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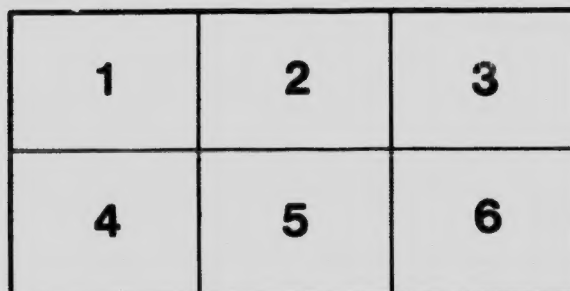
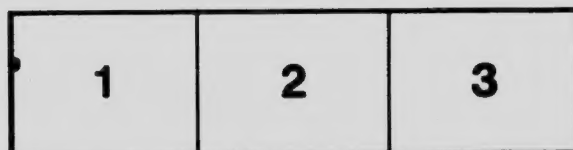
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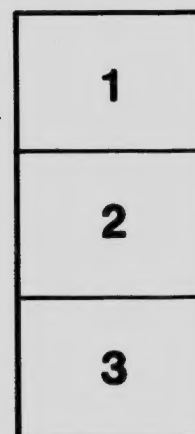
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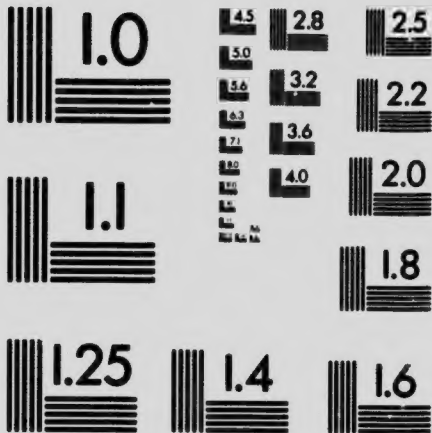
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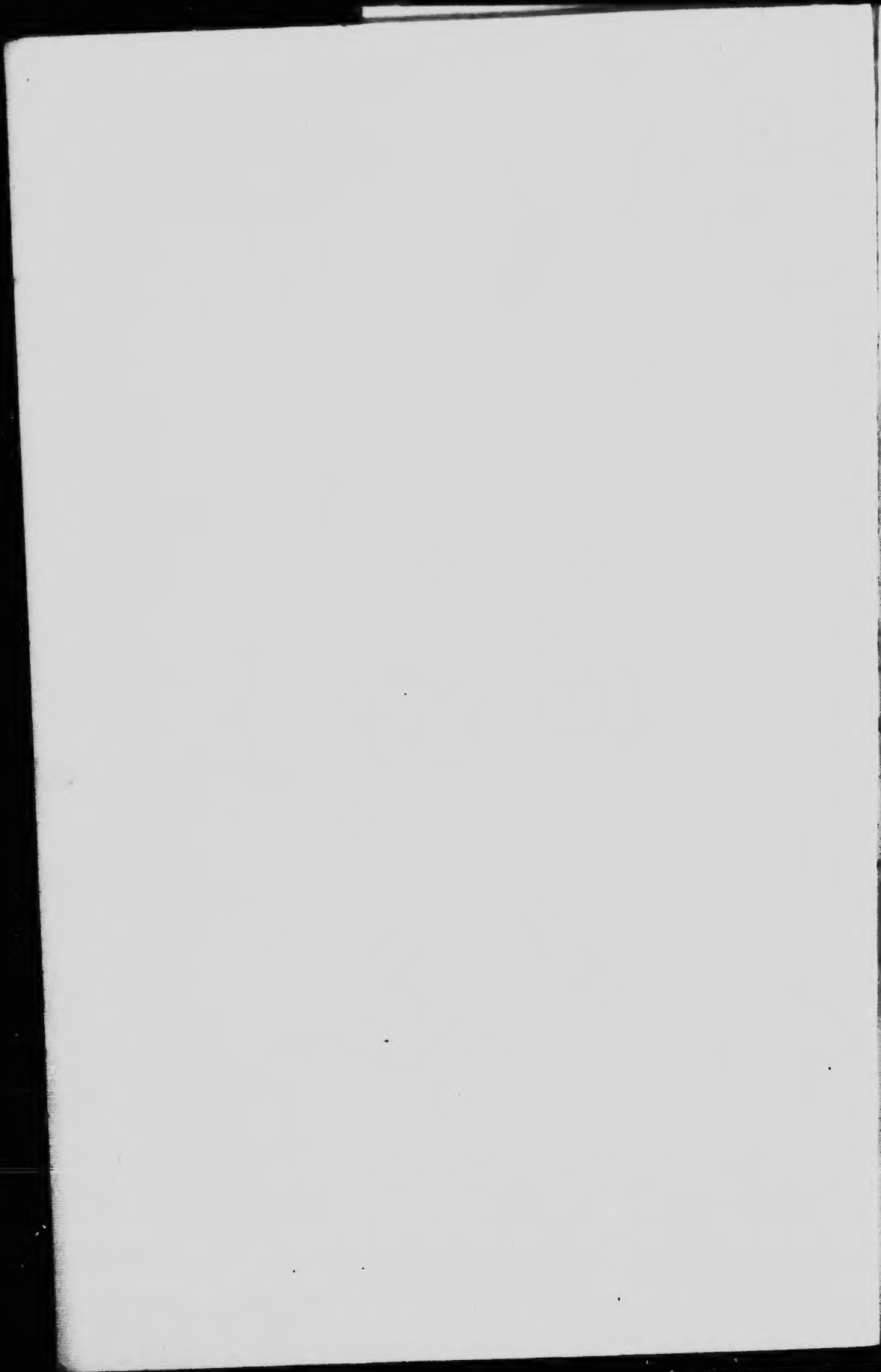


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OH, MR. BIDGOOD!

By the Same Author

**THE FINGER OF
MR. BLEE**

A Tropical Comedy

OH, MR. BIDGOOD!

A NAUTICAL COMEDY

BY PETER BLUNDELL



LONDON: JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY
TORONTO: BELL & COCKBURN MCMXIV

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DEDICATED
BY PERMISSION
TO
HIS HIGHNESS
THE RAJAH OF SARAWAK
IN MEMORY OF TWELVE YEARS
SPENT VERY SAFELY AND PLEASANTLY
ON THE BORDERS OF HIS COUNTRY

OH, MR. BIDGOOD!

OH, MR. BIDGOOD!

CHAPTER I

ON a certain starry evening, about that time of year when climate and a sea untroubled by monsoons combine to woo the pleasure-seeker east, a large mail steamer was lying moored to buoys about a cable's length inside the entrance of a harbour in Ceylon.

Smoking funnels, the feather of steam visible at a waste-pipe, a hum of winches fore and aft, gleaming headlights, and row upon row of glowing portholes imparted to this vessel a look of vitality. Unlike the others in the harbour, she seemed as though her tethering ropes were holding her. She might have been straining to get away. Actually she had just arrived.

A number of people, women in flimsiest of dinner gowns, and well-dressed men, clustered round the brightly lighted saloon entrance and lined the bulwarks, talking noisily. News had arrived of another Japanese victory, and here and there tiny groups were standing under the incandescent lamps studying the long, narrow sheets of Reuter's telegrams which had just been brought aboard.

Departing passengers filed in a constant stream down the accommodation ladder to the tender that, hissing steam, was about to start for the shore. Stewards carrying trays of clinking glasses from which protruded straws, or bundles of wraps and handbags, appeared and disappeared, while black and oily Cingalese, arriving silently from nowhere, were opening bundles covered with American cloth and

exhibiting their glittering contents to anyone who had an eye to spare. Beyond this ship were many other ships arranged in tiers, all strung with a multitude of tiny lanterns, and at their back shone the clear, unwinking lights of the town. Darting green and red lamps, a hoarse shout now and then, and the swirl of a propeller marked the passage of busy launches. From all sides came the rattle of cranes and the crash of handled cargo, the measured song of the dark rowers, and the roar of the coal as it was tipped into the bunkers. The sweating air was full of dust. The very water seethed with life. And the walls of this dark cauldron, the massive granite moles which cut it off from the outer silence, were sentinelled with arc lamps, the ghastly light of which deepened the shadows and threw a pallid tint on everything.

In a dark corner of the main deck, on the edge of a crowd of luggage-chasing people reminiscent of a railway terminus, a spare, quiet, middle-aged gentleman stood and watched the second-class passengers disembarking. They were many in number, most of them seemed to travel in families, and some wore strange shaped topees, obviously bought at Port Said. They filed slowly past him in the pale glare of the arc light, thin, worried looking men with frail wives beside them, and children herded together in front, missionaries with collars on, and pallid, puffy gentlemen without, an Arab accompanied by a gaudily arrayed and thickly veiled woman, bronzed and beefy personages, possibly seamen.

All of them carried luggage, except a late arrival who followed at an interval after the others, walking beside a flat package which two stewards were struggling with, and of which he was evidently the owner.

"Be very careful, my friends; if you smash it you smash me," said this gentleman in a high-pitched voice as the procession passed.

The quiet passenger in the corner gave a very slight jump and looked closer; but he was a little too late and saw only the back of a short, stout man who was wrapped in a sort of opera cloak and whose head was surmounted by a broad-brimmed, soft felt hat.

"Dear me, that's very strange," muttered the passenger. "It's Ethelred Tingle. I wonder if I ought to go and speak to him . . . Perhaps not. Perhaps he wouldn't know me. It must be thirty years ago since I saw him last. Ah well! Fancy that, now!" He turned and saw the top of the box slowly disappear down the accommodation ladder.

"I wonder what Ethelred can be doing here?" he said to himself. "In the Church still, perhaps. I shouldn't wonder at all. He was dressed like a clergyman—and yet not quite like a clergyman. How very extraordinary! It only shows how small the world is. But then it might not be him. Dear me!"

They had not been exactly friends, but he remembered Ethelred in their school days as a boy with a halo, a damaged halo smelling a little of sulphur, perhaps, but still wearable enough. Other boys sat on forms, but Ethelred was usually to be found standing on one. In the very early days they had often stood on one together. Once it had suited them better to stand up than to sit down. That was on the day after the robbery of the headmaster's only apple tree. There was no forgetting that day. The dusty schoolroom, hung with discoloured, thickly varnished maps, the rollers of which hung by a rag or two; the spectacled usher in his accustomed place beside the blackboard; all the boys silent behind their ink-stained desks; and there on the dais, severe, awful, his beard bristling, the headmaster, holding between finger and thumb that well-known handkerchief, the one Ethelred had used all the term.

"And am I to understand, Tingle," the headmaster had said, "that this execrable rag, this outward emblem of an unclean personality, found in my orchard this morning and marked T. 2, is not your property?"

"No, sir; not mine, sir," Ethelred had answered, weeping and feeling in every pocket for something to wipe his tears away with.

The look of scorn on the headmaster's face! He could shiver at it yet! "Oh, Tingle," had said the headmaster very slowly and very witheringly. "Oh, Tingle, dirty without and dirty within! Take this rag, you will need it." And Ethelred had.

Of course, as Ethelred had pointed out afterwards when they were standing on the form together, the handkerchief was not, strictly speaking, his. It belonged to his father, the man who had bought it.

Later on there had been another episode. He and Ethelred, youths of seventeen and eighteen, had gone looking for entertainment to a revivalist meeting, where, much to his astonishment, Ethelred, moved beyond measure by the earnest speaker, had taken his place on the penitents' bench, and before the week was out had become a speaker at the meetings himself.

They had lost touch of each other after that, but news came to the suburb of Ethelred touring the country as preacher with a pony and van, and later of his pawning the said pony and van and fleeing abroad, an outlaw. From that time he had vanished utterly. And now—— The middle-aged passenger said "Dear me!" again, and getting his slender luggage together, hailed a sampan, went ashore, and drove to his hotel.

The surf was drowsily beating in as the gharry rattled along the promenade. A warm, salt-laden breeze blew softly from the sea. Lights were dim here. Ghostly figures flitted by. He found himself nodding. But the

noise in the big white hotel, the blaze of a myriad incandescent lamps, the whirr of numberless fans effectually roused him. He passed along to the desk, engaged a room, and became at once a nonentity as does a bee on entering a hive.

Of course he could have escaped extinction: he might have worn a blue evening suit, for instance, or dyed his inconspicuously grey hair. He did none of these things.

His name was Thomas Todd. It was a quiet, unpretentious name suited to a quiet, unpretentious business man. He was glad he owned to it. Had anyone told him his whiskers were uncommon looking he would have sacrificed them relentlessly. As things were, however, he was so used to them that their absence would have made him feel odd.

The number of his bedroom was 693, a fact worth noting as illustrating the size of the hotel, of which so far no map has been published. Corridors there are like streets in a socialist paradise. All the rooms are very good and they all resemble each other; all the beds, the washstands, the dressing-tables, the carpets, the towels, the views of the bathrooms resemble each other; nobody is better housed than his neighbour.

Black servants or guides in white linen skirts, and wearing brass plates on their arms and combs in their hair, haunt the corridors. One of these persons piloted Mr. Todd back to the broad staircase which zigzags the building from kitchen to attic. Unable to lose his way again he descended, and, plunging into the moving multitude on the ground floor, disappeared from view.

When he came into view again he had just sat down at a little square table on the verandah, and was ordering a dusky, oily, skirty, and be-coiffured waiter to bring him a whisky and seltzer.

Where he sat it was almost dark; the rays of the multi-

coloured glow-lamps in the garden did not reach him ; a large white pillar intercepted the light from the hall.

Seated in this quiet place one could survey, as though from the stalls, the immense activities of the hotel, or, turning, look into the velvet night.

Out there stars lit the gently moving ocean that washed the beach a hundred yards or so distant ; a fronded palm shewed dark and delicate against the sky. On a small lawn just beyond the verandah rail two frogs had made their appearance, hopping about solemnly in polygons. A large snake glided rapidly across the patch of light. Man might have been miles away. And the building he sat in was the latest product of civilisation, a thing of ferro-concrete and of electricity, of lofty, white-enamelled halls, of slender pillars of pseudo-oriental decoration, and of light.

On the whole, biassed perhaps by the incident of the snake, Mr. Todd approved of the look of up-to-dateness about this habitation. The verandah railings were a shade too open, perhaps. He made a mental note about looking under his pillow that night and in his boots next morning, and took another sip at his whisky and seltzer.

Carriages and rickshaws, motors and gharries, were now streaming up to the entrance. And presently in a distant part of the building a band struck up a waltz. The tables near him began to be more thickly occupied, at first by cool-looking people, later by youthful couples, obviously from the ballroom. Waiters flew about with ices and large tumblers. Gallants fanned their partners vigorously. Jewels shimmered, silks rustled, shoulders gleamed. The air was heavy with scent, and light with laughter. And it grew very hot.

As time wore on the crowd grew more interesting, merrier, and more mixed. There were American women in Paris gowns, planters' wives in muslin, men in evening dress, silk suits, white suits.

It was a man in a white suit that kept Thomas Todd up ten minutes longer than usual, and a tall, fair girl in muslin. They sat at a table very near him.

"I'm surprised at your suggesting such a thing, Mr. Evans," he heard the girl say. So far as he could make out, the man wanted her to go and sit in the garden.

"Well, you might call me Sam, anyway," urged the man.

"I can't do that," said the girl coolly.

"Why?"

"Well—not yet." She was good looking, and, so Mr. Todd thought, of a much better stamp than the man. She might have been thirty.

"Why not, Helen?" urged the man, putting his head very close. It was sickening. Mr. Todd, wearing his eyeglasses, observed with pleasure that she drew back hastily.

"Perhaps—one of these days, if you don't disappoint me," she said, evidently temporising; but her companion was apparently one of those men who will not take "no" for an answer. Mr. Todd, although he could not catch what was said, saw clearly that the man's pestering was making the girl uncomfortable. "A pestilential fellow," he muttered, and took another sip of his whisky and seltzer.

"Well, at any rate," said the man at last, rather triumphantly, "you are coming with us on the *Susan Dale*." A remark which made Mr. Todd sit bolt upright and listen hard.

Unfortunately, at that moment some people sat down at the next table and talked so loudly that the girl's reply was drowned. The man twisted his small black moustache in a sulky fashion and listened to her, interposing a remark now and then. Presently they got up and went away. And Mr. Todd finished the whisky and seltzer and drifted off to bed.

CHAPTER II

THE vagaries of shipowners in general and the complete idiocy of their own employers in particular was the main theme of a conversation between two middle-aged gentlemen in a hotel billiard-room near the docks on the following day. Captain Porter, commander of the *Susan Dale*, a clean-shaven man of generous proportions, who had during two hours succeeded in scoring eighty, attributed his lack of success that afternoon entirely to the worry and anxiety which the short-sightedness of the *Susan Dale's* agents was causing him.

"It isn't for myself that I mind, of course, Bidgood," he remarked to his chief engineer. "It's the name the boat has got among these shippers here that I've got to look out for. People seem to think out here that I'm a nobody, a figure nothing. But I'm not."

"Of course you're not," agreed Mr. Bidgood sympathetically. He stroked his straggling black beard.

"You may be and the rest of the crew may be," continued Captain Porter, "but I know the owner. I was engaged by the owner and I'm the man he'd look to supposing the ship wasn't doing as well as she should . . . Your shot." He straightened his shoulders and with a bloodshot, angry little eye watched his chief engineer attempt a cannon that the great John Roberts himself would never have dared even to contemplate.

"Yes, Bidgood," he went on. "Thomas Todd himself

said to me as we shook hands in his office in England just before I sailed: 'Porter,' he said, 'I look to you, remember that.' "

"Aye, you've told me about it often," said Mr. Bidgood.

"I told the agents about it too," went on Captain Porter angrily, "this morning. Asked them what they meant by it—loading up all this gear when we had a lot of general cargo waiting for us to take to Hong Kong. Pianos, sewing-machines, pickled pork! Why couldn't they cart their own pianos, sewing-machines, and pickled pork to Hong Kong themselves, instead of transshipping it on to us? Why?"

"Some agent's dogged, maybe," suggested Mr. Bidgood, making an attempt to look wise.

"That's it," exclaimed the captain, grounding his cue irritably. "And I let 'em know as much. Washed my hands of the whole affair. Told 'em I'd report it personally to Mr. Todd. They laughed in my face! Yes, that's what they did!" he repeated in horror-struck accents. "Laughed in my face!" He bent down and almost bisected himself against the table in a vain endeavour to pot the red.

"Hard lines," said Mr. Bidgood flatteringly.

"I could have pulled that stroke off at any other time," said the captain in a gloomy voice; "but what with this and the other I've had a trying day of it, a trying day, and it's told. Did you hear what that upstart of a mate on the liner said to me when we were alongside?"

Mr. Bidgood stopped chalking his cue. "No. I see you talkin' to him on the bridge, but what he said I didn't properly hear," he said.

"He stuck his ugly head over the railing and asked me what I wanted with hundreds of barrels of pork. 'Take my tip,' he says, 'and try water and dry toast for a bit. No pork or potatoes,' he says. 'Cold bath every morning, to be followed by Swedish drill.' "

"The cheek o' some of these upstarts," muttered Mr. Bidgood, who was wearing one of the captain's waistcoats and felt the insult personally.

"But I told him off," said Captain Porter bitterly. "He knows what I think of him and his like now, with his gold lace and his cuffs and his white clothes that he can't afford to pay for the washing of."

"I'm glad of that," said Mr. Bidgood.

"But it wasn't any good," went on the captain still more bitterly. "He stuck his silly head out of his collar and asked me to be kind enough to say what I said again to a piano accompaniment! To a piano accompaniment, mind you! I'd have given five pounds to have had him down on my deck!"

"The chaps aboard that boat want a talking-to, they do that," growled Mr. Bidgood, accidentally adding another three to his score. "There was a fellow aboard of her that wanted to know if we was come alongside for his ship's ashes."

Captain Porter promptly miscued. "What! Did any-one dare to say such a thing as that?" he asked in an outraged voice.

"Aye did he."

"Well, we may as well chuck this game. That's finished me," said Captain Porter. "I can't play after hearing a thing like that said about my ship. Look how my hand's trembling."

Mr. Bidgood solemnly considered the article which the captain held up for his inspection, and after some hesitation said that it did seem worse than usual.

"Worse than usual! What do you mean?" demanded the captain, grounding his cue.

"Oh, nothing," said Mr. Bidgood confusedly.

"What—do—you—mean—by—worse—than—usual?" the captain asked again in suppressed tones.

"Sometimes—you know—of a morning," said Mr. Bidgood in confusion, "I've sort of noticed——"

"Ha, you've been watching me, have you?" broke in the captain sharply. "I don't thank you for it. You've got plenty to do to look after your engines. We don't pay you for watching. No, we do not! What we pay you for is for doin' your duty and not joining in with every little sucker on a liner that wants to give me sauce."

"I never did," muttered Mr. Bidgood.

"I don't know what you call it then," said the captain, replacing his cue in the rack. "Letting people insult me by asking if we were come for their boiler ashes, and standing by and never saying a word."

"How do you know I didn't say a word?" asked Mr. Bidgood.

"You never said a word," said the captain angrily. "Do you think I don't know you?"

"I did that," asseverated Mr. Bidgood. "I give 'im 'is answer quick enough. 'No, we 'aven't come for your ashes,' sez I, very short, just snubbin' 'im right away. He was quite affable and respectful after that. Said he didn't know I was the chief engineer of the vessel, owin' to me having my boiler suit on, and that if he had he wouldn't have spoken so disrespectful."

"Was he a clean-shaved chap with a big nose?" asked the captain in somewhat mollified tones.

"Ay, that was him. A decent young fellow enough when you got talkin'. He said he hoped he'd have the pleasure of seein' me again, being-interested in mathermatics, and understandin' that engineers could turn any mathermathical problem upside down and skin it while other people were just fogged. He said he was always wondering about such a problem as this: 'Aving been given sufficient cloth and sewin' cotton and 'aving the cloth ready cut out, how could he calculate how many sewing machines it would take to

make the boiler suit such as I was wearing in a workin day of twelve hours? 'It's an easy enough sum,' says I, 'but you must have given you the rate of work of the machines, the length of the seams, the——'

"You told him that!" cried Captain Porter. "You—you . . . I would have laid hold of something and thrown it at him!"

"What for?" asked Mr. Bidgood, looking mystified.

"Why, can't you see he was giving you sauce as well as me?" roared the captain. "You must be a silly dumhead!"

"How?" demanded the mystified Mr. Bidgood.

"If you can't see I can't tell you," said the captain bitterly. "This is the sort of way we keep our ends up! The laughing-stock of every little gold-braided beggar that wants a little amusement! Come on, let's push off." He drained his glass and set it with some force on the table. They began to get their things together preparatory to leaving the billiard-room, and Mr. Bidgood was wondering whether, if he offered to pay for the game, he would have to, when a Cingalese waiter came up.

"You won't play any more, gentlemen?" asked the waiter. "Two gentlemen here waiting to play." He indicated them by a graceful bow.

"But we don't want to interfere with your game, we wouldn't dream of doing so," cried one of the new-comers in a high-pitched voice. "Do not let us hurry you, I beg."

"It's all right, mate," said the chief engineer. "Captain Porter and me are just about pushing off."

The new-comer glanced at the captain. "Captain Porter?" exclaimed the one who had just spoken, a short, stout man. "Have we the pleasure of meeting Captain Porter?"

"That's me," said the captain, staring hard.

"What! *the* Captain Porter?" enquired the stout new-comer enthusiastically.

"I'm the man," briefly replied the captain, looking rather suspicious.

"The well-known commander of the *Susan Dale*?"

Captain Porter bowed stiffly and appeared as if he were trying to think what this stout stranger with the heavy ginger moustache could have heard about him.

"This is the most extraordinary good fortune," explained the stout man. "I have just come out from home by the mail on a trip which will, I hope, afford me instruction as well as pleasure. It has, in fact, already begun to do so. My name is Ethelred Tingle, late colonel of the Brazilian army, and this is my friend, Señor Canaba of the same service, who is on his way to rejoin the embassy at Saigon."

"My chief engineer, Mr. Bidgood," said the captain apologetically. Mr. Bidgood, much confused, bowed and felt sorry he had not put on his clean white suit.

"This is the most extraordinary good fortune," said the stout man again, "is it not, Canaba?"

The other stranger, a handsome, swarthy man, said it was. He spoke with a noticeably foreign accent.

"We were looking for you," explained the stout man.

"Oh!" said Captain Porter suspiciously.

"They told us we should probably find you in a bar or a billiard-room," said the stout man. "You see you are pretty well known."

"Yes, we are, more or less," acknowledged Captain Porter in guarded tones. "What do you want of me?"

Mr. Bidgood, who also felt suspicious, looked at his superior approvingly.

"Nothing," said the stout man volubly. "Nothing of any moment save to be able to record in my diary that when in Ceylon I encountered the famous Captain Porter, and shook him by the hand. Will you oblige me in this, sir?"

The captain, with some stiffness, did so. Mr. Bidgood also submitted to the operation.

"Thank you," said the stout man. "Another notable day in my wanderings, and without undue braggadocio, Mr. Bidgood, I might say another notable day in yours. The hand you have just clasped, Mr. Bidgood, was not disdained by the late Dom Pedro."

Mr. Bidgood inspected it with some interest, and noted the diamond on its third finger.

"He used to shake it every morning in the old days," put in the Spaniard reverently.

"And now——" said the colonel, "it is almost as if Captain Porter had shaken hands with him himself."

The captain said he would be glad to do so at any time. Mr. Bidgood could see plainly that he was impressed.

"Thus I link Brazil and Ceylon together in friendship," went on the stout man. "And now, if you will permit me, I will cement the bond. You shall tell me what you think of these." He withdrew the hand, and plunging it into his coat pocket brought out a cigar-case.

The two sailors helped themselves gingerly. The Spaniard waited on them with a match.

"Very good, Colonel Tingle, in my opinion," pronounced Captain Porter after a few puffs.

Mr. Bidgood, trying to look like a connoisseur, confirmed the verdict, but spoiled himself rather by remarking that he always smoked a pipe.

"I am extremely glad that you think favourably of them, gentlemen. All experts do," said the colonel. "The tobacco comes from my plantations in Brazil. I gave my friend Dom Pedro one of them some time ago and his opinion was much the same as yours. And—a very funny thing—I, for the joke of it, told him I would not accept his opinion as final. By Gad! I can see his face now when I told him this. We were standing talking, just as

we are now, in a private room in the palace. He was about to proceed to a meeting of his cabinet, and wanted me to drive down with him and render him my support. Naturally I refused to do so. He ought to have had better sense than to ask me, knowing as he did that I prefer controlling government matters from the background. He looked a bit hurt at my refusal, I thought, so I gave him one of my cigars—it came out of the same box as the one you are now smoking, captain—and I asked him what he thought of it. 'Excellent, Tingle, my dear fellow, like all your efforts on my behalf,' he said, turning away. 'I shall get another opinion, though,' I said, laughing, and I happened to look into a gigantic mirror that stood near the massive gold candelabra, and caught a glimpse of his face. It was awful, gentlemen, I assure you. Enough to make the blood of any ordinary man run cold. 'Aha, my friend,' I said to myself, 'that's your little game, is it? Well, we'll see if we can't spoil it.' And where, may I ask you, gentlemen, is Dom Pedro now?"

Mr. Bidgood, not being in a position to say, kept silence, as did his superior.

Colonel Tingle smiled at them confidentially. "It is very necessary to assert ourselves sometimes, you know that, captain?"

"Certainly I do," said Captain Porter, nodding intelligently. "Authority must be maintained."

"I say, who was this chap, Dom Pedro?" murmured Mr. Bidgood in a hoarse but perfectly audible aside.

"Shut up," whispered the captain. "Don't give yourself away."

The colonel, exchanging a remark with his handsome friend from the embassy, appeared not to notice the interruption.

"My friend here suggests a little liquid refreshment," he said, laughing. "It's just like him. Now can I offer

you anything, wine say, to mark the occasion of our meeting ? "

" Half-past four," reported Captain Porter, consulting a large gold watch perfunctorily. " I'm quite agreeable The sun's well over the yard-arm."

" Exactly so, 4.30 to the minute," said Tingle, exhibiting a rival timepiece.

Mr. Bidgood mechanically put his hand to his waistcoat and produced a pocket corkscrew which occupied a temporary position at the end of his massive gold chain. He replaced it instantly in some confusion.

" Our friend is prepared for any emergency, I perceive," remarked the colonel, laughing again.

" Quite so," said Captain Porter. He glanced at his subordinate disapprovingly.

" Men who rise to an emergency are men after my own heart," continued Tingle. " And do you know, Captain Porter, that those were the exact words the emperor said to me when I returned to the Brazilian capital after quelling the Pahantic Rebellion in '89. ' Tingle, my dear fellow,' he said to me over the wine and walnuts, ' I couldn't say it before the ladies, I didn't want to bring a blush to your cheek, but now as man to man I may tell you that the country considers your services are worth their weight in gold. Men we have in plenty,' said he, ' rich men, talented men, men versed in diplomacy, but the country can give them all for the simple, silent soldier, willing to rise in an emergency.' And would you believe it, Captain Porter, although we afterwards disagreed, to his sorrow, on that evening I had an almost filial respect and affection for the emperor, Dom Pedro ? "

" I can well believe that," said Captain Porter, blowing his nose loudly.

As it was now quite plain to Mr. Bidgood that the company considered a man who carried a corkscrew on his

watchchain to be, not ill-bred as he had at first supposed, but in fact rather plucky, he again produced the article in question from his pocket and lent it to the waiter to open the bottle.

"We'll sit over there, waiter, at that corner table," ordered Colonel Tingle. "When I talk, gentlemen," he continued, "I like—though of course it's not always possible—to talk in a place where there are no outsiders hanging about ready to note down every little remark I may happen to let slip about political matters. One can't be always on one's guard. In the present instance perhaps my caution is a matter of supererogation——"

"What's he say?" murmured Mr. Bidgood.

"Says he's not to be had on," translated the captain in an irritable whisper.

Mr. Bidgood glanced at the colonel admiringly.

"Supererogation," continued the colonel, "in that no doubt the great majority of the people who patronise this billiard-room probably do not know that there is such a place as Brazil, and quite possibly have never heard my name."

"I don't believe it," said Captain Porter cordially.

Mr. Bidgood was understood to say that he, too, had heard of Brazil.

"Then you think there might be danger of my name being recognised?" asked Colonel Tingle, looking around sharply. "Well, then, will you please address me as 'colonel' only. A man like me has many enemies. Perhaps we are safe enough here, but I can assure you that an occasion might at any time arise when the very fact of your being seen in my company would be sufficient to be a source of grave menace to your persons."

"How's that?" demanded Captain Porter.

"Revolutionaries, bombs, daggers; you know the sort of thing," explained the colonel easily.

Mr. Bidgood, horror-struck, at once grasped his topee and half rose to his feet, but a glance from the captain restrained him and he sank back on his chair again, mopping his brow feverishly.

This seemed a poorish end-up to their afternoon. What Captain Porter could be thinking about to remain for an instant in such a dangerous neighbourhood he could not imagine. There must be some good reason, money perhaps, or a strange liking for adventure for its own sake which as yet he had not detected in his old companion. He glanced at him anxiously. The captain, bathed in perspiration, was sitting calm and quiet, with a watchful expression on his face. His eyes stared fixedly at the middle of the table, and Mr. Bidgood following them at once perceived that they rested on the untouched bottle. Of course ! How stupid of him not to think of it ! There stood the cause of his old friend's hesitation. Politeness cost nothing, especially when dealing with revolutionaries. The captain had as usual chosen the better way. He was going to risk it and stay. But why this dilly-dallying and talk ? The bottle was open, and all this time the air was getting into it and spoiling the contents. Well, well, the captain would make a move in his own good time, and meanwhile he, Mr. Bidgood, would also risk it, would sit by him and see that no harm came.

Colonel Tingle continued the somewhat one-sided conversation, which had veered round to the subject of ladies in Brazilian society.

"Love," he was saying, "love ! Why, the word makes me laugh, as I daresay it does you, Mr. Bidgood."

To save an argument Mr. Bidgood admitted that it did.

"You read about it in fiction," went on Colonel Tingle, "in the so-called novels that masquerade as expressing the opinion on these matters of our contemporaries ; and what do you find, Mr. Bidgood, what do you find ? "

"That's so," said Mr. Bidgood, nodding. He assisted the captain to stare at the bottle.

"You find them talking about constancy, platonic affection, a life-sufficing love, in their puling manner ; you find them insisting and dwelling on these matters as though they existed in reality. But men of the world like you and me, Mr. Bidgood, who know things as they are, what do we say to their ignorant philosophising ? How do we answer them ? "

"Very true," replied Mr. Bidgood patiently.

"We laugh and brush them away as a man brushes away a fly from his bald head. Like this——" In his anxiety to make the matter perfectly clear to Mr. Bidgood, Colonel Tingle swept his hand over the marble table and accidentally knocked down a wineglass.

"Lucky the glasses are still empty," cried Captain Porter like a knife.

Mr. Bidgood gave his superior a look full of admiration.

"Empty ? Confound my unfortunate memory, so they are," exclaimed Tingle. "Waiter, fill these glasses and don't stand staring there. If you want to stare go away somewhere and get employment as an idol. You'll be an idle idol, I'll be bound. Ha, ha ! Rather good, that, wasn't it ? Ha, ha, ha ! Well, gentlemen, your good health. I'm pleased to have made your acquaintance, and hope this won't be the last time we shall crack a bottle together."

"We hope not," returned Captain Porter and Mr. Bidgood cordially.

"At any time, at any place between here and the North Pole, either in the council chamber or in the camp, I shall be at your service for the purpose, gentlemen. I'm a man of action myself and I like the society of men of action, men who can tell me facts, not theories, mark you, about the places and peoples among which we may happen to be sojourning. What do you say, Mr. Bidgood ? "

"I don't hold with them theoretical chaps myself," said the chief engineer. "They can't do their job down below in the engine-room. I had a second engineer with me once, and all he thought about was doing his calculations. Always busy about with a slate and a bit of pencil. When we had a breakdown, up he would be in his cabin working out with his slate and pencil how we was to repair it. No, mister, give me the practical man, the——"

"Exactly," said Colonel Tingle. "Either in the council chamber or in the engine-room that is what is wanted, men who know their work and can tell others how to do it. That is what I like and that is what drew me to you, Captain Porter, when your name and antecedents were mentioned to me on the steamer coming out."

"What did they say about my antecedents?" asked Captain Porter. "No harm, I hope?"

Mr. Bidgood, who now learnt for the first time that his superior possessed such things, cocked an attentive ear.

"Harm! I should think not," cried the colonel warmly. "They could not praise you enough, and told me that anyone in Ceylon would confirm what they said. Your reputation for bravery and fair dealing, Captain Porter, has spread farther than perhaps you in your modesty imagine. On every side I have heard testimony as to your knowledge of men and manners and of the East. And I, Ethelred Tingle, congratulate myself heartily on having been privileged to make your acquaintance, and shall not be afraid, if need be, very shortly to ask such a favour of you as one brave man may ask of another."

CHAPTER III

"**S**HALL we give her a clipper bow, my dear ? " Thomas Todd's father had asked Thomas Todd's mother, one morning when the *Susan Dale* was being built.

" You know best, dear," Thomas Todd's mother had dutifully answered, after the manner of wives in those days.

" And the propeller ? "

" May I—may I have a pale blue one ? "

And a pale blue one she had ; but alas, it was blue no longer. Captain Porter had painted it red, and Thomas Todd—well, to say the truth, he, had he given the matter a thought, would have probably backed the captain. Pale blue was a sickly, sentimental, unbusinesslike sort of colour, whereas red—the British ensign, letter-boxes, sealing-wax. Besides, red was a good, lasting colour, and Mr. Todd at that date had little money to throw away either on paint or on anything else.

So hard up was he—and it was not his fault either, for had not he had his nose to a ledger day in and day out for thirty-five years, invested his money as his broker told him to, and never even considered marriage ?—that but a month or two before he had been deterred from selling the *Susan Dale* only by the fact that the buyer wanted to take something off the price because of her clipper bow. Paint her how they would they could not alter that clipper bow ;

and even as a large sideboard left him by his maiden aunt has before now altered a man's style of living, so was the fad of the father to influence the fate of the son.

"We didn't know Todd and Son owned a yacht," the prospective buyer had said with a grin when Thomas handed him the photograph.

The insinuation of frivolity hurt; there was some ground for it. On the photograph the *Susan Dale*, with her bow, her figurehead, her lines and bowsprit, had a yachtlike look. And there was a certain air of breeding even about the original, clearly visible as she rested there in the harbour; an atmosphere of fallen greatness—fallen greatness in need of a bath.

For the last twelve hours they had been loading her, and now she lay alongside the buoys, a link in a chain of vessels stretching the length of the breakwater.

Numbers of cases containing pianos and sewing-machines had been packed in her forward hold. Five hundred small barrels of pickled pork were stored away aft in accordance with the instructions received per the Eurasian clerk from the office. Her every other space had just been filled with Indian coal, the dirty product of the mines of Hyderabad. The last grimy lighter still lay alongside, its half-corroded deck and the empty coal bags on it covered thick with coal-dust; and the *Susan Dale* from the top of her stumpy masts down to her water line was covered with the same material.

It lay thick upon her tattered awnings, hiding the patches, and on her worn wooden decks, clinging to the casings of the deck-houses, darkening the engine-room skylights so much that the Chinese firemen below had perforce to cease work, blackening the white paintwork on the bridge. It invaded every cranny, it reached the innermost nooks, through keyholes, through the smallest cracks and crevices, into the sugar, into the soup, and even,

for it was no respecter of persons, into that holy of holies, the very stateroom of the captain.

About the alley-ways it was playing still, griming every face aboard, visiting the stokehold, blowing down ventilators and powdering the heads of those who sat beneath them ; and then up again with the breeze, over the side, into the fiery sunlight, and away for ever.

A good deal of it found a final resting-place in the breathing apparatus of the second mate, Mr. Skinner, setting up irritation and making his asthma worse. Every time he spoke, he told Mr. Dixon, the mate, his mouth got full of the beastly, brimstone stuff.

"She'll be all the better of a wash down ; in fact, we'll all be the better of a wash down," said Dixon. "Get the men out and tell them down below to start the donkey pump."

"Very good," said the second mate. He was an old man with a thin, bent figure.

"By the way," continued Dixon, "you might send that lighter away from the side. What it is hanging on to us for I can't imagine. It should have been cast off long ago. I'm going for'ard to see to that mooring line."

"Anything else ?" asked Skinner in a surly voice.

Both of them wore suits of grimy khaki. A sprinkling of coal-dust had given their skin a peculiar greyish tint. But the mate's face, like his figure, was that of a young man, and he had close-cropped yellow hair.

"No —" he began in an absent-minded way. "Oh yes ; did you ever hear anything more about that barrel of pickled pork that's missing ?"

"No, I did not," replied the second mate irritably. "You keep 'arping on that barrel of pork. D'ye think I've stole it ?"

"Of course not," said Dixon.

"I've told ye before ; the man put it down somewhere

close to the engine-room door and went away to get a mouthful of water. When he got back it had gone."

"All right," said Dixon. "It's a pity, though." There was a moment's silence. "That's all I can think of just now," he continued. Smiling in a friendly fashion—his even teeth shewed up white and regular—he turned and walked away.

"Always orderin' me about," mumbled Skinner, glancing after the big figure with marked disfavour. "Whipper-snapper!"

He walked with a crablike action to the side and looked over. In the distance a dozen or so of the black devils who had stirred up all this coal-dust were visible, packed in a row on a half-submerged catamaran. Another steamer, white as a virgin, awaited them. Mr. Skinner gently protruded his thin neck and put his head over the rail.

"Hey!" he called.

Natives lying on the coal bags stirred in their slumbers. A cloud of dust arose with a swiftness almost incredible and caught him with his mouth open. He at once repeated his remark with variations. It became evident to the natives that some European was busy up above. They arose and gibbered at him, gesticulating, and shewing ivory teeth.

"Cast off there," cried Mr. Skinner.

The natives gesticulated more frantically than ever, pointing to a square opening in the deck of their craft.

"They seem to want something," muttered Skinner, looking at them suspiciously. "The ignorant beasts! Why can't they talk English?"

He had another look, and then, shrugging his shoulders, called the native boats vain, and ordered him to find out what was wrong.

"They say, Tuan," reported the boatswain after a long confabulation with the captain of the lighter, "that there

is a lady in their cabin who wants to have speech with the Tuan."

"A lady?"

"The aunt of the ordinary seaman, Jemaludin."

Mr. Skinner looked again. A middle-aged Malay woman, hatless, smooth-haired and copper-skinned, was standing in the opening of the lighter's deck. She salaamed.

"What does she want?" enquired Mr. Skinner. "*Apa mau?*" he called out in Malay.

The woman salaamed again, saying something unintelligible.

"This woman," explained the boatswain, "and her husband, a Singapore man, want to visit their aunt's half-sister in Hong Kong."

"Ah!" said Mr. Skinner, transferring his gaze to the boatswain's feet.

"Having heard on all sides that the Tuan Skinner is a man with a white heart——"

"Um!" said the second mate.

"And of a pitiful attitude towards the poor——"

"Look here, cut it short," said the second mate. "If they want to come with us to Hong Kong it's five dollars a head, money down."

"Whatever the Tuan's attitude towards the poor dictates," said the boatswain after another short conversation with the woman.

"Money down; pay it to me now," commanded Mr. Skinner. He glanced round. The mate was busy on the fore-castle head. "Lower a line for it."

She sent it up to them tied in a piece of dirty rag: ten Straits dollars, nearly as big as five-shilling pieces.

"Tell her to slip aboard quietly some time about midnight," whispered the second mate. "And keep them out of sight in the fo'c'sle." He clutched the money and made a bee-line for his cabin. There was rumoured to be a wooden

box there, so heavy with dollars that three men could hardly lift it ; in fact, both Dixon and Evans, the second engineer, said they had more than once caught a glimpse of it. On the other hand, Mr. Skinner always told would-be borrowers that all his money went to the support of four unmarried sisters. But, as the mate had pointed out when the matter was talked over, although, if the sisters took after Skinner, it was very probable that they were unmarried, it was equally probable that they would not want any money to spend, and certainly the second mate never spent any himself. Consequently, it was extremely likely that the rumour about the box was true : and if so, Skinner, the humble second mate, was the richest man on board, the captain and the chief engineer having recently lost all their savings in a tin mine, while Evans and Dixon took care never to have anything to lose.

The second mate was a long time in the cabin. When he returned all the deck hands were busy with mops and brushes washing down the ship. The salt-water pipe against the rail was clicking regularly. Water hissed from every flange of it. A brown, half-naked sailor stood at the end of a leather hose pipe holding a nozzle. White water spouted, caught the sun, and sparkled. The decks ran ink. And the sailors worked as though they liked their job.

Mr. Skinner took up a position just round the corner, and by dint of occasional peeping kept an eye on his cheerful subordinates. Being an old man he was afraid of the wet, and being Mr. Skinner he never trusted anyone if he could help it.

It was just after a particularly ill-timed peep that the mate found him engaged in a frenzied soliloquy.

"Why, you've washed your face !" said the mate in pretended astonishment.

"He did it a-purpose," Skinner spluttered. "I caught

the swine pointing his hose at me. I'll break every bone of him."

"No, no," the mate said soothingly. "It was an accident; I saw it myself. Why, I've been caught like that hundreds of times. All in the day's work, you know."

"It's not in the day's work."

"I've seen passengers pay to have the hose turned on them," said the mate.

Mr. Skinner pointed out that passengers had not his rheumatism. He said he wished they had, but stultified himself immediately by expressing the hope that they were already in a certain place where obviously the disease cannot exist.

"Look here, old man," said Dixon persuasively, "you go and get a rub down. I'll look after things."

The *Susan Dale* was a clean vessel when the second mate came back; that is, she was about as clean as usual. The second mate was cleaner. Dixon looked at him in obvious surprise.

"I'm going ashore for a bit," said Skinner awkwardly, in explanation. "Want to see if my sextant's repaired. They've been messing with it nigh on a week now."

"All right," said Dixon good-naturedly. "I say, if you come across Evans you might tell him from me to let me know as soon as he can if they're coming."

"If who's coming?" asked Skinner, looking at the mate's feet suspiciously.

"Well, perhaps I ought to have told you before," said Dixon with some signs of hesitation. "As a matter of fact, we are expecting two lady passengers this trip."

"What?" exclaimed Skinner in a displeased voice.

"They won't interfere with you at all," the mate hastened to explain. "Friends of Evans's; in fact, one is a sort of relation."

"But the ship ain't allowed to take passengers," objected

Skinner. "Women aboard here ! Why, I shall have to dress and shave and I don't know what."

"That'll be right enough," returned the mate persuasively. "They won't bother you. Why, I doubt whether they'll know you're on board. They are taking the trip for their health ; a bit off colour. They are nurses in a private hospital here."

"It shouldn't be allowed," declared the second mate testily. "I've a good mind to write and tell the owner. Interfering with my comfort. Turnin' the ship into a——"

"Into a what ? " interposed the mate sharply.

"A—a—passenger ship," ended Mr. Skinner with marked weakness. He walked away abruptly and a minute or so afterwards the mate saw him in a sampan being rowed ashore.

The first breath of the night breeze was now ruffling the water of the harbour, stirring the pennon of a grey cruiser that lay near by, and the flags of the far-away town. The deep blue sky had taken on a bordering of opal, and the light of the setting sun was very clear.

Dixon, leaning on the rail, followed the sampan's progress. He saw Skinner walk up the landing steps and disappear. And before he looked away some other figures came into sight : first porters carrying luggage, next a man dressed in white, and lastly two ladies who, as they encountered the sunlight, simultaneously put up their parasols.

They were coming, then.

CHAPTER IV

"**S**UCH a favour as one brave man may ask of another," muttered Mr. Bidgood, leaning back in his chair and feeling at three rupees in his trousers pocket.

During thirty years of existence as a sea-going engineer he had met many men, principally in the bars of public-houses, who had requested favours of him. They were all of them men of persuasive manner and oily tongue, men who, as he expressed it "could pilfer you from top to bottom and you not know they done it."

Experience had taught him very early in his career that no matter how much money he took ashore the amount he brought back never varied. Acting on this grand discovery he made it a rule to carry but little on him. And that little the ginger-moustached stranger was perfectly welcome to—if he could get it.

But what about his superior? What about Porter? Ah, no need to worry about him, he reflected with a smile. He had sailed with him now for more than fifteen years, and never once had there been reason for the slightest anxiety on his behalf. On the countless occasions when they had visited the shore together how many times had they been approached by plausible individuals, all of whom had been through the South African war, or some other war, and against whose tactics he alone would have been powerless?

He had never failed to wonder at his companion's skill on these occasions: at his condescension towards the flatterer, at his dignified acceptance of the proffered drink at his bulldog courage when the crisis came, when the favour was asked, at those noble words about lender making enemies that always issued from the firm mouth and at that look of grandeur as the would-be borrower finally cringed away.

Usually then there was no fear for the captain. But in the present case was somewhat different from the others. The ginger-moustached stranger claimed to be a Brazilian colonel, and so far had not mentioned South Africa. And he was obviously in no very pressing need of funds. That fact his gold watch and the handful of gold and silver he brought out to pay for the bottle of wine proved clearly enough. Then what deep-thought-out devilment could be lurking behind those bilious eyes of his? Hard to say. And the strenuous way the man talked gave nobody time for a spell of clear thinking.

It was obviously part of his art, this continual flow of speech, designed to befog the minds of honest men like doctored beer. He was speaking of favours again now; of fair women grovelling before him out there in Brazil; of the great ones of the earth pressing for a card to his receptions in Paris; of stealthy visits of ambassadors who wanted something.

The minutes passed. Señor Canaba, sitting in a draught, was coughing frequently and examining his watch. But still the captain sat immovable. It was only when "mines" began to be mentioned that he stirred in his chair, gulped down the contents of his glass and refilled it.

The watchful Mr. Bidgood imitated him. This finishing of the liquor was an old move of his superior's and indicated that the crisis was approaching.

"'Mines,'" said the captain suddenly. "You've come to

the wrong shop if you want to sell a mine. I've had some."

"Where should I be without him?" thought Mr. Bidgood, clutching at his three rupees.

"My dear Captain Porter," said Ethelred Tingle with an astonished stare. "Whatever gave you the idea that I wanted to sell a mine to you or anyone?"

"Well, I'm just telling you, that's all," returned the captain shortly. "We're not buying mines."

"Especially tin mines," added Mr. Bidgood. He closed one eye and aimed a friendly kick at his superior. Señor Canaba sprang to his feet, muttering an imprecation, and then sat down again, staring round him ferociously.

It was abundantly plain to Mr. Bidgood that he and the captain had once more been too good for their enemies. He therefore released the three rupees and used his hand to elevate his glass. Captain Porter glancing at him briefly did the same.

"No," continued Ethelred Tingle, "I deal neither in gold mines nor tin mines. When one happens to come into my possession I do not sell it. I give it away."

Mr. Bidgood at once replaced his hand in his trousers pocket.

Captain Porter smiled incredulously.

"The petty merchantings and chafferings of this commercial age do not trouble the soldier," continued the colonel. "A sword and pistol, a handful of gallant fellows to cheer on to victory, a supper off biscuit and brandy after a day in the saddle, a bed under the stars are his only requirements. Those, of course, do not cost much. Luxury and effeminacy find no place in his scheme of things. The savings bank and those who cluster round it, the marts and markets of civilisation appear to him corrupt and despicable, only to be used as the hawk uses the fowl-yard—to snatch a meal and then to soar away. Why should I

fret my soul with such paltry things as ways and means stocks and shares, gold mines and tin mines, so long as a piece of silver or two and a pair of gallant comrades willing to share it with me are to be discovered ? Why, I ask you, Mr. Bidgood ? "

The chief engineer nodded wisely and kept a grip on the three rupees.

" No, Captain Porter," continued Tingle, " I seek a profit from no man. All I ask is to be allowed to go on my way without let or hindrance, and woe betide him who would thwart me. I meet his craft by a darker craft, his courage by a better courage ; I topple over his defences, crush him to powder and then pass on. But when I meet gallant fellows after my own heart, like you and Mr. Bidgood, they are to me as brothers. I share my dangers with them, they participate in my triumphs, and so long as they are with me half my purse is at their disposal. To shew you what I mean, Mr. Bidgood, I ask you to examine these Bank of England notes."

He drew from his pocket a bundle and flung it on the table.

" You have a look at 'em, captain," muttered Mr. Bidgood, shrinking back, one hand still in his pocket.

Captain Porter picked up the bundle gingerly and went through it. " One hundred pounds in five-pun notes," he announced, holding one up to the light.

" My week's pocket money," remarked the colonel in an off-handed way. " Kindly count them out into two heaps, captain. . . . Thank you."

Mr. Bidgood took his hand out of his pocket and began in some excitement to stroke his coarse black beard. Large drops of perspiration, which the fan that waggled above their heads was entirely unable to cope with, formed on his brow and shewed like dew in his bristly hair. His large ear faced the speaker.

"These little pieces of paper now held by Captain Porter and myself," continued Colonel Tingle, "so feeble, so flimsy that the very breath of an ordinary wooden fan is enough to blow them away, through the window, out into the street, under the heel of the rickshaw coolie, sticking to his feet, to be scraped off into the first gutter, and to disappear for ever down the nearest drain—what are they for but to be flung aside as worthless, Mr. Bidgood?"

"Very true," agreed Mr. Bidgood. With a potato-like finger he attempted to push one of the worthless pieces of paper referred to farther under the captain's hand, but found the task impossible.

"Obtained from the pith of a tree," went on the colonel, "or perchance the product of the grasses that wave in the breeze on the fair plains of Spain; macerated and mashed, rolled under rollers, sized, calen——"

"Very true, colonel, and very interesting," observed Señor Canaba, interrupting. "But what our friend, whose time is of value, would like to know is—What do we want of him? Tell him in a few words, the fewer the better."

Mr. Bidgood looked at the speaker with much approval.

"Very well," said Ethelred Tingle. "I will be brief, for, as you justly remark, time, which by the way was made for slaves, not for men, is passing. To cut the matter short I will explain as follows: My friend Señor Canaba and his retinue are, as I made you acquainted with just now, on their way to Saigon to join the embassy there. They therefore want to proceed at once to Hong Kong; and I, who at present am making the grand tour for about the fifteenth time, can wish for nothing better than to accompany them. We did intend to go by the regular liner; but to speak plainly, Captain Porter, neither the señor nor myself care much for the persons who are in

charge of these enormous vessels. They are, if I may so put it, too stereotyped, not enough hail-fellow-well-met for devil-may-care soldiers used to the freedom of the camp fire. We like, if possible, to travel with officers who have more *savoir faire*, with thorough men of the world, in short. And directly your name was mentioned to me I made up my mind that if we were lucky enough to meet you, I should like to accompany you on your travels. Consequently——"

"In short," interrupted the swarthy señor impatiently, "we ask you to take us as passengers to Hong Kong and to accept an honorarium of fifty pounds for so doing."

"What say you, Captain Porter?" asked the colonel. "Shall we contemplate the possibility of a week or so spent in each other's society, pacing the promenade deck of your vessel and exchanging reminiscences of our doings throughout the globe, or shall we not? It is for you to decide." He leant over the table and waited for the captain's decision in obvious anxiety.

Mr. Bidgood, once more releasing the three rupees, followed his example. It was not so much what would the captain decide; it was how he would lead up to his decision. The game was theirs. It was merely a matter of the number of tricks.

"I'm afraid it can't be done," said Captain Porter.

Mr. Bidgood looked knowingly at the bundle under Colonel Tingle's hand.

"And why?" asked Señor Canaba ingratiatingly.

"Owner's orders," grunted Captain Porter. "No passengers allowed. That's so, isn't it, Bidgood?"

Mr. Bidgood said it was.

"I never heard of such an extraordinary state of things," remarked Colonel Tingle. "Do I understand you to tell me, captain, that you allow other people to decide whom you shall carry on your vessel?"

"It's as much as my billet's worth to be found with passengers aboard," stated Captain Porter emphatically.

"And mine," asseverated Mr. Bidgood, determined to own a risk also.

"Awful ! Gross tyranny ! I should resist such a state of things by force of arms if necessary," declared Tingle, waving a podgy hand helplessly.

"It would be no good," said Captain Porter. "Touch a man round this harbour and they'll jug you."

"But why should any one know ?" put in Señor Canaba, extending a persuasive hand. "We could bestow ourselves on board at the last minute before leaving and hide until the ship was on the ocean."

"What do you think, Mr. Bidgood ?" asked Tingle.

Mr. Bidgood's face at once assumed a non-committal expression. "It's nothing to do with me," he said. "It's him. If he's willing to take the risk, so am I." He eyed his superior with great attention. They exchanged an understanding look.

Mr. Bidgood sat right forward in his chair, anxious not to miss the slightest hint.

The captain lit a pipe with much deliberation. "Well, we might be able to do it," he said at last. "But it will be a costly business."

"It will that," affirmed Mr. Bidgood, nodding first at the colonel, then at Señor Canaba. They were doing excellently ; he could read that in the captain's face.

"But what about those half-caste clerks what we sometimes give bribes to, Bidgood ?" demanded the captain, as if struck with a sudden thought. "What if they come aboard ?"

Mr. Bidgood scratched his head and stared. "What clerks ?" he asked at length, in order to gain time.

"The ones we are always bribing," explained the captain, winking vigorously.

"Oh, them!" exclaimed Mr. Bidgood with an air of enlightenment. "There's them, of course."

"You can deal with them all right if they come on board, can't you?" demanded the captain.

Mr. Bidgood could do more. Obviously his superior had only invented these clerks in order to destroy them. It should be done at once. "They won't come on board to-night," he said. "They're working overtime."

"Then we shall not need to bribe them," declared the captain in a disappointed tone.

"Say we make it fifty-five pounds to cover all expenses," suggested Tingle.

"Very well," said the captain; "I'll take it." He glared at the chief engineer.

Ethelred Tingle, selecting another banknote, handed it across the table and put the remainder in his pocket. "That is for all the passenger accommodation," he remarked. "We do not want any strangers aboard with us."

"You can't have it all," said Captain Porter. "There are two young ladies coming with us as far as Hong Kong."

"That's unfortunate," said Tingle. "Women are always a nuisance on board a steamer. If I had time I could give you many instances of it. Cannot you put them off?"

"No, I can't," returned the captain shortly.

"They will be very much in the way."

"In the way, colonel?" exclaimed Señor Canaba. "Not at all; the ladies are never in the way." He spread his hands, shrugged his shoulders, and smiled at Mr. Bidgood.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Bidgood, simulating merriment.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Privately he thought he had never seen a man with such

a horrible smile. The recollection of it made him shiver more than once as he watched the Spaniard, who had now bent over and begun to talk in some foreign language with the other stranger. Even the gain of twenty pounds or so would hardly be compensation for being shipmates for a fortnight with such bloodthirsty persons as these. And, by the way, he might just as well have his share of the spoil now. The captain was doing nothing.

"I say, Porter," he said in a hoarse whisper, "just tip up my half while you are about it."

The captain, who was sitting in a reverie with his enormous hand still covering the notes, raised his head and looked the chief engineer stolidly in the eye.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded in a hard, loud voice, and gathering up the notes he put them carefully into an inner pocket and buttoned his coat.

The stupefied Mr. Bidgood was about to protest, when Colonel Tingle, turning, again told Captain Porter that the ladies would be in the way.

"It is too late to speak about it now," said the captain. "They are likely aboard by this time, and having dinner." He looked at his watch.

Mr. Bidgood thoughtlessly made to imitate him.

"I said dinner, my man, not liquor," remarked Captain Porter very severely.

Mr. Bidgood hurriedly released his watchchain. He couldn't be expected to think of everything, especially at that moment, worried as he was by the fact that everybody seemed to have forgotten that such a person as the chief engineer of the *Susan Dale* existed.

Why had not Porter divided up as usual? Did he intend to stick to the lot? And now he was rebuking him publicly. It was not to be borne.

"Who are you?" muttered Mr. Bidgood sarcastically. "You and your tittle-tattlings!"

Captain Porter stared at him for a moment in astonishment.

"Go aboard at once, sir," he roared. "You disrespectful cockatoo, you! And don't let me see you the worse for drink again. You must have gone dotty."

The last sentence so exactly formulated a doubt arising in Mr. Bidgood's mind that he was unable to think of a suitable reply. He rose and endured the withering glance of the captain for a long moment. Then his eyes dropped, he picked up his topee, and slowly crawled away.

"That comes of treating these fellows as equals," he heard Captain Porter remark fiercely to the company. But he was too dazed to properly appreciate that further insult.

Head down and mournful in aspect, like some bereaved elephant he stumbled up the marble stairway from the billiard-room and walked mechanically towards the bar.

Saluting waiters he passed by unheeded; men butted into him and escaped without reproof; a marble-topped table did the same, but even its assault and crashing fall failed to unfix the puzzled expression of his countenance.

It was too big, too reeling a blow, this latest action of the captain's, to be recovered from in a few minutes. Hours must pass, nay, days, before he could hope that his self-respect would have reached a stage of convalescence, and after that there would still remain a scar which the constant sight of his superior on board the *Susan Dale* could not but keep in a perpetually inflamed condition.

Base ingratitude, sheer ill-fortune, old friends unfaithful, public insults, bank-notes, home truths stated, blows struck, bleeding noses, thoughts of all these things jostled each other in disorder in his brain. He gasped from time to time. Plainly he wanted air. And all the while pictures flashed before him, especially one of a brawny chief engineer,

bare to the singlet, standing over a sea-captain who cowered and cringed amid a jeering throng.

When he recovered consciousness he found himself clinging to a large tumbler in the secure calm of the hotel bar room.

Above his head a two-bladed wooden fan revolved peacefully, while right in front across the marble bar on which he leant stood rows of gaily labelled bottles and cut-glass decanters, all of them gleaming and beaming like so many friendly lighthouses. It was apparent that all was not yet lost, that there was still a spot in the hotel where he could take his ease safe from the insults of unjust captains and the contemptuous, half-pitying smiles of alleged Brazilian army officers.

He examined the partly smoked cigar that still remained in his fingers, discarded it in favour of a black briar pipe, and sat down at a white-topped table to think the matter out.

Since he had joined the *Susan Dale* some ten years ago, this was the first time, so far as he could recollect, that a quarrel of any great magnitude had occurred between him and his commander. Disagreements there had been in plenty, disputes, for instance, about the fair division of commission on coal, little squalls if steam had not been turned on deck promptly enough, or when maybe the paint had been burnt off the funnel through the extra fierceness of the boiler fires ; but these blustering moments had been few and far between, and Captain Porter had conducted himself towards him on the whole with that courtesy and consideration to which all chief engineers are entitled, but which some, he knew, did not always obtain.

At first, of course, there had been difficulties ; suspicious glances ; awkward questions such as any captain might be excused for putting to a newly-joined officer to test his capacity and character ; quick, stern commands about

matters of no importance given in order to shew him as chief engineer what his position was aboard the ship. But he, Mr. Bidgood, had emerged triumphantly from the ordeal, and a little incident, his offering to divide with the captain a box of cigars, a present from a firm of ship's chandlers, had made the two of them fast friends, sharing each other's pleasures and profits.

The fact that he knew things about Captain Porter and Captain Porter knew things about him which would, as they imagined, be enough if revealed to get either of them ten years' imprisonment was an additional bond between them, a bond which grew stronger with the passing years.

All these facts Mr. Bidgood more or less appreciated. And as men balance themselves on bicycles and cannot explain how they do it, so he had kept his equilibrium in the favour of Captain Porter by an instinctive process of give and take.

But lately the captain, never a man with much give about him, had been all take. There must be some reason for the development of this nasty side of his old friend's character. "He's never been the same man since the time of that tin mine," muttered Mr. Bidgood.

But had not he, Mr. Bidgood, also lost money, and was his entire nature embittered by it? Certainly not. Then why should he put up with the captain's nonsense? Why should he be publicly reprimanded? And above all, why should he be robbed of half that fifty-five pounds?

This was the clear-cut shape in which the matter finally presented itself to him. But as yet, puff as he would at his black briar pipe, expectorate as accurately as he might into yonder white enamelled spittoon, no solution had occurred to him. Telling the captain what he thought about it, although for the moment solacing, would do no permanent good; handing in his resignation would be an

equally futile proceeding. Moreover, in adopting either course he would obviously be laying himself open to further insult.

No, the only thing was to be cunning, was to be cautious, to be silent and watchful, and in effect to wait, as does the spider, for something to turn up.

He knocked out his pipe against the tiled floor, mechanically sought to ascertain the hour, thrust back the corkscrew with a muffled word or two, and slowly rose to go.

Outside the bar room, along the narrow, coloured gallery that flanked the street, underneath the whizzing fans, Eurasians of blotched and indeterminate feature sat in twos and threes at round-topped tables. The smoke of their cheap cigarettes fouled the air. They seemed to be watching him. He could almost have sworn that he saw two of them point and exchange smiles.

With a quickened pace and straightened back he passed into the entrance hall, and there he came across the second mate.

"Ho, chief!" said Mr. Skinner, exhibiting signs of pleasure.

"Ho!" said Mr. Bidgood.

He passed the second mate, turned, and began slowly to retreat backwards.

"Nice evening," said Mr. Bidgood.

"It is that," affirmed Skinner, advancing. "Where's your hurry?"

"Just pushing off," Mr. Bidgood informed him. "We're getting away to-night and I'm not going to be late."

"No hurry," returned Skinner. "What's the time, anyway?"

Mr. Bidgood put up his hand to look and suddenly dropped it. "Find out, you skinny old skunk, you," he shouted in sudden anger. "What do you take me for? Away and buy a watch for yourself, you mingy feller, and

don't come to me with your pesterings. I'm not a town clock."

He strode off indignantly to the landing-stage, was rowed to the *Susan Dale* by an affrighted boatman, and walked straight to his cabin. He was so worried that it took him half an hour to get to sleep.

CHAPTER V

MEANWHILE night had enwrapped the city ; not roughly, almost angrily as in other climes, but with the quick touch of a mother soothing her child. The veil of darkness spread was almost visible. Zephyrs, cool breaths from above, the heavy scent of flowers blossoming in the tree-tops came downwards, entangled in its folds. Through it the lights of clustering houses diffused a mild and even glow, while in the suburbs lamps shone dimly, discs on a velvet robe.

Numbers of people were in the streets, walking to and fro, aimless as moths, barefooted, silent, their white garments loose around them ; men whose faces shewed jet black in the lamplight, women with flower-braided hair.

Rickshaws, each freighted with a single soul, passed from time to time, soundless, but for the soft pad-padding of the pullers' feet ; coming from the unknown, voyaging one knew not whither. The low noise of their passage seemed but to intensify the silence.

From the unfathomable darkness of cocoanut plantations came infrequently the plaintive cries of animals ; and above the perfumed gardens of bungalows nightjars wheeled and swooped, sounding from time to time their clamorous note.

Many of the better dwellings were brightly illuminated, but parts of the native quarter of the city shewed scarcely a lamp. There, rows of low huts looked dark and desolate.

Only once and again a door, quickly opened and as quickly shut, or a glimmer through the crack in some badly fitting woodwork, indicated the presence of inhabitants.

A house near the end of one of the streets, distinguished from the others by its two stories, was an exception to this state of things. It was as bright as a lighthouse, every window ablaze, every door open. A continued buzz of conversation issued from the interior, of men talking, sometimes softly, often in tones of defiance and anger. From time to time a loud laugh rent the air, and anon there came the twang of a guitar and the roar of a baritone voice uplifted in a Spanish song.

"Marianina, bewitching maiden, thou hast charmed my heart away, Marianina, bewitching maiden, thou hast charmed my heart away."

All this was noted and commented on with some annoyance by the two occupants of an advancing rickshaw, but while the one contented himself with hissing out a short remark or so from under his black moustache, the other in a high-pitched voice gave a rapid sketch of his views on the singer, the street, the city, Ceylon, the world and the universe, and wound up by embracing all, including the rickshaw puller, in one general commination.

"If these are the quality of men that you have recruited for the cause, Canaba," he began again after drawing a deep breath, "I am afraid we shall have some trouble."

"What would you?" retorted the Spaniard. "The count's telegram reached us in Manila three weeks ago only. We had nothing to shew that Don Carlos authorised the undertaking——"

"But he will," broke in Tingle eagerly. "The count himself said so when I told him my discovery concerning the *Susan Dale*——"

"——and the best men would not come in," continued Canaba evenly. "Now listen to me. You come

here and exhibit your jewelled picture of His Highness, and doubtless the natives will flock to us when we tell them that Holy Church has blessed it. But you come here with your letter signed by the count, with your commission as general signed by the count, and you offer us no proof that His Highness has given you any authority whatever."

"But he can't," burst out the colonel. "His position will not allow him to."

"Under these circumstances, I think we are fortunate to have done as well as we have done," went on Canaba. "We have sufficient men, we have our passages booked, we have our pilot for the Philippine coast waiting here now to take the oath. And also, my dear general," he continued with a slight sneer, "we have you—although I must in honesty tell you that we had none of us heard of you before."

"What, not heard of my services to the Brazilian emperor?" exclaimed Tingle. "Great heavens!"

"No, I regret to say we have not," said the Spaniard.

"Most extraordinary!" exclaimed Colonel Tingle. "Why, I was thanked by Dom Pedro personally for my gallant conduct in the fight near Santos."

They paid off the rickshaw and walked into the house.

Inside the hut next door a middle-aged Malay woman withdrew her eye from its accustomed spyhole and faced the room. Here the gloom was so deep that from where she stood the farther wall was barely visible. The outlines of rafters shewed above her head, slanting away into the darkness of the roof. Trodden earth, sour with generations of usage and smelling evil, formed the floor. In the centre on a mat there reclined two figures. The woman addressed them.

"The fat and red-whiskered one with his sallow companion

is now come," she reported. "He has paid the puller in silver money. The puller, after vainly contending for more, has now departed in much contentment. The fat one and his companion have entered the house."

"Fool, and the sport of the base and ignorant. Deceived by the simple guile of an obscure puller of a vehicle," commented one of the dark figures on the mat. "Truly this man, in spite of his fatness, is no money-lender. What think you, Jemaludin?"

"Your thought is my thought also, uncle," said the other in a sullen voice. He knocked the ash from his long yellow cigarette and gave his companion a light. They smoked.

The pungent, almost incense-like odour of native grown tobacco began to drown the other smells that held the thick air. In the colourless darkness a pot or so shewed on the mat, and near by, close against a wall, lay a couple of roughly packed bundles, seemingly of clothes. So was the place furnished. The woman, turning to the peep-hole, resumed her watch.

"Outside there is no more noise," she reported after a time. "Men have ceased to walk the streets. The door of our neighbours' house is already shut." She glided over to the mat and, squatting down, reached out for the betel box and examined its contents.

"Oh, great must be the power of the ginger-whiskered one," she muttered, selecting a siri leaf and smearing it plentifully with lime. "The noise of those who made music has ceased. Listen! not a sound comes from the house."

"The realms of silence are the breeding-grounds of the plotter," softly observed the older of the two men. "In the watches of the night cockroaches gnaw the garments of the faithful."

"Truly your husband has a talented mouth, Suliemina," remarked Jemaludin in a lazy voice. He stretched himself,

and from the skirt-like garment that half covered him a thick, bare leg appeared.

"Words are oftentimes as empty as hands," observed the wife critically. "Hens lay eggs, but the cockerel stands on the dunghill and crows."

The elderly man stirred uneasily. "A good wife is as a pearl of perfect form, rolling hither and thither and never coming to rest in her anxiety to serve the interests of the household," he stated in a slightly irritated tone.

"Ha!" said the wife. And again there was silence.

"Why did you send for me?" asked the sailor after a while. He watched the woman light a small tin lamp and search for the betel cutter.

"We needed you," she said. "To-night we leave this dwelling, and take passage to Hong Kong in the ship where you have your abode." Cutting off a piece of betel nut she began to wrap it in the leaf. Her nephew stared impassively.

"When the soil is over-sandy the tree must be transplanted or it dies," explained the elderly husband obscurely. He drew the betel box across, and pressed his cigarette against it.

"Unless one uses manure," pointed out the sailor.

"There is none in this city," snapped the old man.

"Therefore we leave," explained Suliemina. "Our household effects are in yonder small bundles. Our fate is in the hands of the prophet Mahomet."

In the feeble circle of light cast by the flame of the lamp her hands shewed smooth and brown, their supple henna-dyed fingers moving quickly as she finished rolling the leaf. Her face was barely visible.

"There is also another matter," she said. "We wait an hour or so for that."

The brighter glow of a cigarette end betokened her nephew's quickened interest. Her brown hands holding

the green bolus disappeared for a moment, and returned empty. A faint noise of chewing became audible.

The sailor, with a slight wriggle, brought his stumpy foot within the illumined circle where it rested, the white-soled and ugly termination of a hairy brown leg. That for a while was the only movement among them. Except that the woman's ample bosom rose and fell, and the old man breathed a little noisily, they might have been carved of wood. At last the old man spoke again.

"The constantly sitting hen clucks continually," he observed, "but her efforts are of small value. It is the watchful bird that fattens herself and the pocket of the master."

Sulimmina sank down on one bare arm. "There is no need to haste," she murmured. "Our neighbours are still in the room below. When they begin to mount above, tumbling and stumbling up the stairs, I shall hear them as I sit, and then begins our labour."

"And wherefore not begin our labour now?" suggested the old man. "Does the squirrel steal the eggs of the crow when the parent bird is sitting on the nest?"

"What labour?" asked Jemaludin, with a faint touch of anxiety in his voice. He bent over into the circle of light, revealing a broad, unintelligent face, short of forehead and wide of nostril, and a pair of magnificent shoulders.

Sulimmina, in the shadow, laughed softly. "Does Jemaludin love pearls?" she asked. "Does he love diamonds and rubies to adorn the neck of the fair?"

"Pearls are concealed in the tight-shut oyster," began the old man, "but——"

"Cease thy chattering, uncle!" exclaimed the sailor impatiently. He turned to the woman with a deeply interested air.

"Chattering!" muttered the old man in disgust.

"Where have you seen such things, aunt? Have you some for me?"

"I have seen them in a picture," murmured Suliemina. She raised the lamp, and lit a cigarette, gazing at her nephew the while through half-shut eyes. Her face in the flickering light looked worn and a little evil, but that she had been comely once was plain enough. Her shoulders were bare and still were beautiful.

"Yes, I tell you; in a picture!" she said again, and broke into a giggle at the look of disgust on the man's face. "They are stuck in a picture," she explained at last, putting the lamp down.

"Say you that?" said Jemaludin.

"The ginger-whiskered new-comer bore it with him yesterday," went on Suliemina with animation. "I, from my position on the shoulders of this my husband, in the evening looking into their upper room, saw it in its glory surrounded by men who prayed. Diamonds and pearls sparkled on it. It is their god. And the priest-like ginger-whiskered one, when they were departed put it in the iron case again, and fastened it with many keys."

"Pearls are concealed in the tight-shut oyster," began the old man, "but——"

"And is it still there?" broke in Jemaludin eagerly.

"Still there. I have watched and listened, and in my absence this my husband watched and listened for me. They have not moved it. The case is heavy."

"Perchance if we touch the god of a white man evil will haunt us," suggested the sailor in a doubtful voice. He scratched his head vigorously.

"A man like you, and afraid!" exclaimed Suliemina in scornful tones. "This grey-headed tiger then shall use his claws for me." She pointed to the old man who, however, said nothing.

"I am not afraid," murmured Jemaludin. "But this occurs to me: how can we open the iron case?"

"Pearls are concealed in the tight-shut oyster, but oysters yield easily to the pocket-knife of the true believer," gabbled the old man in one breath. He sank back on his haunches with a satisfied air. His companions seemed not to notice him.

"The plan is," continued Suliemina in an earnest whisper, "that we wait till they go up again to worship their idol. They will do it to-night. White men always pray at night. Have I not been an ayah and seen them? At night also they are drunken and forgetful. And perhaps we can then slip in."

"It is well," said the sailor. "And now—we wait?"

"We wait," Suliemina said, stretching out her hand for another cigarette.

In the dead silence they now preserved the faintest noise was very audible. The rustle of a mouse in the roof, the distant rattle of a vehicle, the sigh of the wind outside, the occasional slight creak of the woodwork, all seemed intensified. The house might have been a vault with three bronze monuments within, an oriental tomb where a lamp was kept aflame perpetually, and priests burned incense to the god of rest.

And then suddenly the woman sprang to her feet with a supple ease that belied her face, and glided to the wall. "Hush!" she whispered, raising an arm. A faint noise of voices came in from the house next door.

"They mount the stairs," she murmured, listening. She stole across the earthen floor and took up the lamp. "Come!" she said.

Outside the night was inky black. The sky above was blanketed with clouds; but low down and far towards the east a faint light, like the break of dawn, sharply defining the squat roofs of the surrounding huts, shewed the position

of the harbour. And the hot smells of the undrained city pressed around.

The eaves of the huts were but man high, and without much difficulty the woman and her two companions clambered on to the roof, and crawled upwards over the rough, rounded tiles. Some six feet above was the brightly lighted window of the next house. Suliemina mounted on her nephew's back and looked in.

Men were to be heard plainly now talking in the room above, there was a shuffling of many feet, and now and then came the sound of a voice, high-pitched, monotonous, and interminable.

"Do they pray, Matmamudin?" asked the sailor, bracing himself against the wall.

"Pigs grunt at the trough, and the famished donkey brays for the evening meal," returned the old man ambiguously, "but all these things are as naught to the true believer."

"But do they pray, uncle?" persisted the sailor.

"To speak plainly, I do not know," said the old man testily. The breeze becoming stronger, he crept round for shelter to the other side of his brawny nephew and stood waiting patiently.

Time passed. A bat, attracted perhaps by the light that flowed from the window, came and wheeled backwards and forwards very close above them. Two or three stars appeared in the sky. The darkness lessened perceptibly. And as yet, the woman, her eyes glued to the window, gave no sign.

"The body of my aunt is a large one and well nourished," remarked the sailor length, panting slightly.

"A fat wife means a kind husband," observed the old man in self-congratulatory tones. "He shall strut before his neighbours, yea, he shall strut before them continually

and receive their admiration." He chuckled, and at a gust of wind shrank closer to his nephew.

The sound of the high-pitched voice ceased. There occurred again the noise of shuffling feet. A door banged.

"I find my ponderous aunt is straining my muscles about to the breaking point," said the sailor again in distressed tones.

"Does the mother complain of the weight of her child, and shall the child complain of the weight of his mother?" asked the old man reproachfully.

"But—this is my aunt," objected the sailor.

"Your mother is heavier than your aunt," pointed out Matmamudin craftily. "The camel complains not of its hump, nor the ox of its yoke, nor the horse of its rider, nor the stag of its horns, nor the tree of its fruit, nor the straw of its rice, nor the bee of its pollen, nor the——" he was continuing volubly, when Suliemina suddenly bent down.

"They have brought the picture in," she said in an intense whisper, and then quickly resumed her position.

The old man put a hand on his nephew's sweating back encouragingly. "Does that help you?" he asked in a sympathetic voice.

"Not much," gasped the sailor. "In a short time—I shall be overcome."

"Think of other things," counselled the old man, "and the weariness will have left you. Think of happy days to come, of the smell of flowers, and of the scented hair of the beloved one, of well-filled dishes, and of cool and grateful drinks." He put his other hand on the wobbling back.

It was draughty up there on the roof, and the rough tiles made but an indifferent standing place. But for long enough the old man made no complaint. As time went on, however, he began to shew signs of restlessness.

"Silence is golden," he remarked, raising his voice

impatiently, "but when a wise woman opens her mouth a pearl may perchance drop from it. . . . O Suliemina, do you hear me ? "

"Be patient," murmured the woman very shortly.

"The feet of the faithful are soft and tender," persisted the old man in an irritable voice, "but hard as a very roof tile shall be the heart of the true believer in the hour of victory. . . . Steady, O Jemaludin ! Steady ! " He tried feebly to control the violent wobbling of his nephew's body.

"I cannot hold you any longer, aunt ! " panted that gentleman in a voice that was dangerously loud. "You will fall ! "

Suliemina hastily scrambled down. "Silence, silence," she whispered, putting out her arms and drawing the two men very close. "Some of these whites are gathered near the window," she went on almost inaudibly. "They may hear. Oh, the picture ! I have seen it. I have counted the jewels set in it ! They flash like the sun ! It is small, and made on cloth. I saw it quiver when the priest-like, red-whiskered one touched it with his naked sword while the others worshipped. Oh, he is high in the land, I know it, the red-whiskered one. He wears a great man's uniform. Have I not been ayah to a colonel and know ? And there is a small half-caste who makes oath. Have I not been ayah to a colonel and know ? He swears many oaths. Do I not know English ? "

"Your aunt is a woman of many tongues," explained Matmamudin. "One of them is always busy," he added gloomily.

"And shall we obtain the picture ? " asked the sailor in great excitement.

"Ducks quack, and cats mew, but the old fox sits on his haunches and says nothing," returned his uncle.

"Does nothing," murmured Suliemina. "Come, I

must mount once more. They will eat and drink ; after every ceremony the white man feasts."

She had barely reached the sill when she bent down again. " Your knife, Matmamudin," she hissed. " Quick, you old fool ! Quick ! quick ! "

She wriggled in.

CHAPTER VI

IN spite of her great age, perhaps because of her great age, the *Susan Dale* was not the least comfortable of the vessels that plied between Ceylon and the ports farther east. In her better days, when her decks were white, her brasswork clean, and her propeller a pale and perfect blue, she had been in the regular passenger trade. Once a colonial governor had travelled on her. What need to say more? Roomy cabins, now dismantled, lined the alley-ways. Still roomier ones, a pair of them, graced the bridge deck. These, so the mate told the younger of the two passengers with the air of doing her honour, ladies had never before been permitted to occupy.

"Mr. Bidgood, our chief engineer, used to have the one you are in," he went on, "but he's shifted aft next to the saloon. He says he sleeps so much better when he can hear the noise the screw makes. So I moved in."

"It's all so interesting," said the girl. They had finished tea, and he, with an apologetic manner, was shewing her round the ship.

On such an occasion and on such a vessel defects are importunate as beggars, but the charitable look the other way. She did it very nicely, very naturally. And to him already it was plain to be seen she appeared sufficiently charming. She said that she liked old ships, and hated the smell of new paint.

"The *Susan Dale*'s old, but she's a good sea boat," said the mate, looking down at her. "I hope you'll be comfortable. Anything I can do?"

"You've done too much already, letting us have your cabin. I feel dying of kindness."

"Not at all, not at all," said the mate uncomfortably. He might have added that he had tossed up with the second engineer to settle who should make the sacrifice, and had lost, but he refrained.

He said instead that he was only too pleased, which was excellent; that he would have done the same for anyone, with which principle also no fault could be found; and finally that he was used to being moved.

"I'm glad you haven't had to form a new habit," said the young lady in her bright voice. She glanced up at him demurely. "I should hate to turn out for anyone," she added.

"Not if you'd had my training, Miss Amerton," the mate told her. "You see, there was a big family of us at home. No doubt you have noticed the photographs of them all in the cabin."

She had, as a matter of fact, but only casually. The next time she was in the cabin she looked again. A yellow curtain was drawn across the doorway, and through its loosely woven material the warm rays of the setting sun were penetrating, lighting up the interior with a mellow light, a light decently dim, but still enough to unpack by. She perceived in the picture of a very pleasing-looking old lady a likeness to Dixon.

"That must be the chief officer's mother, Helen," she remarked, bending over ankle deep in folded linen mysteries. Close to one bunk a cabin trunk stood open, and here the other lady passenger was busy. The light shone on her yellow hair, her face was in shadow. Apparently she had no time just then for photographs. She did not even look up.

"Helen Clatworthy," said Miss Amerton. "I hate to repeat my sentences. They won't stand it. But don't you think this is Mr. Dixon's mother?"

"Oh, let me finish unpacking!" said the other, raising herself and glancing up at the photograph perfunctorily. "Yes, I daresay it is."

"Of course she's rather like her son," mused Miss Amerton, "but she can't help that. It's part of the curse of Eve. We all have our sorrows, haven't we, my dear Mrs. Dixon? Not that I think your son any worse than the average. Oh dear me, no! Water is the same article, whether it spouts from a fountain or sleeps in a pail. But I'm afraid most people like a little sparkle."

"You'll be late for dinner, Mary, if you dawdle like this," said Helen severely. She stood upright, a big, rather masculine woman; then, bending down again, pushed the trunk into a corner.

"Put the trunk—below the bunk—and when you've done it I'll give you a chunk—of chocolate," said Mary, sitting down comfortably and opening a paper bag. "For three long years I've been a slave to dinner. I've waited on it hand and foot. I've borne it on trays to patients and I've carried it on a fork to myself. I defy it. It shall wait on me. Nay, I insult it!" She broke off a piece of chocolate and began to eat. . . . The sea, the sea, the beautiful sea, with sailors around me on bended knee, and crowds of gallant officers—ready to strangle the sea serpent if I lift a little finger. . . . Well, I suppose I shall have to make a start!"

She bent over the pile of linen and at once became furiously busy. The speed with which she worked was remarkable. She crawled on her knees and managed to exhibit grace in the act. Later on, too, when she changed her frock, hooks and eyes—invented by the devil for man's undoing—fastened themselves at a touch of her thin fingers. And

when the lamp was lit she stood revealed, dark and small and slender, in a low-cut cream gown, waiting for her turn at the glass to put the final touches to her hair.

They dined in the narrow, lamplit saloon. Mary Amerton described the dinner afterwards as a chapter of accidents tinned in Chicago and warmed up by an enemy. She said that a coffin would have been a more fitting receptacle for the pheasants than a tin. And they were the mate's *pièce de résistance*! But he, sitting at the head of the table, slightly nervous and obviously mistrustful of the ship's cook, could never have dreamed of the wicked thoughts that lay hidden behind her smiling countenance. And how she talked to him and he to her! Of cold baths and why he had one every morning; of votes for women and why he did not believe in them; of the decadence of wives as proved by the increased demand for the domestic servant; of smoking—he said here, perhaps unthinkingly (the cook had forgotten to put sugar in the sweet) that a woman who smoked was in his opinion the absolute limit, morally degenerate; of physical culture, and the training of ship's officers. He listened patiently to Evans's views on the social status of marine engineers.

Afterwards, all thoroughly hot and perspiring, they went on to the poop and drank coffee. The rest of the evening was passed in another wander round the ship.

"I suppose you told them that by rights we ought to carry no passengers?" asked the mate when their guests had said good-night.

"Not I," replied Evans, laughing.

"But they ought to have been told," said Dixon earnestly. "It would be very nasty for them if the shipping-office people happened to visit us."

"We'll let them take the risk," said Evans. "Anyway, if I had told them they would never have come." He lit a cigarette; the pair walked along the deck in silence.

" You are engaged to Miss Clatworthy, Evans, aren't you ? " asked the mate, after a while.

" As good as," Evans answered. " It's not been made public yet, if that's what you mean."

" But you told me some time ago that you were," the mate said, looking his companion full in the face.

" Did I ? " retorted Evans uneasily. " Then I must have made a mistake . . . said the wrong thing, you know," he added with an uneasy laugh. " Like you did at dinner."

" How's that ? "

" When you told us how you hated women who smoked," said Evans, with another laugh. " Well, good-night for the present." He went off to the engine-room, and the mate, after a turn or two on the deck, walked aft to the poop in search of a comfortable chair. It was now about eleven o'clock, and all the crew had long since gone to their bunks. A single light was burning at the gangway; except for this the decks were in darkness.

" I'll take the chair along under the light," muttered the mate, " so as to be handy when the captain and Bidgood come aboard."

He was about to do so when he heard a well-known voice raised in anger, and presently he saw the chief engineer coming up the accommodation ladder.

" Hallo, Bidgood ! " he called out, looking over the rail, but the chief engineer took no notice and walked heavily to his cabin.

" The first time I've seen him come on board without the captain," said Dixon to himself, dragging his chair forward. " They can't have quarrelled ? "

Sitting down at the top of the ladder, he drew out a pipe and began to smoke.

The evening was clear and beautiful. A slight breeze blew in from the sea. He moved his deck chair into the full stream of it, and sat puffing comfortably at his pipe.

Another familiar voice made itself heard at the foot of the ladder in argument about the precise sum the boatman ought to receive for his services, and after a while the second mate stepped on board.

"Oh, Skinner," said the mate, sitting up in his chair, "is that you? I say, you might go for'ard and see if all the crew are aboard."

"Anything else you want me to do on my watch below?" asked the second mate grumpily.

"You needn't do that unless you like," said Dixon.

"But considering I've let you off all the afternoon, and been up since about three this morning myself——"

"Oh, all right," broke in Skinner. He picked up the hurricane lamp that was hung from the gangway.

"Don't make more noise than you can help," said Dixon. "Remember we've ladies on board."

He heard his subordinate growling to himself and watched him slowly progressing towards the forecastle. The swinging lantern in the man's hand threw wild shadows as he passed along the alley-way. The clink of his footsteps on the wooden deck grew ever fainter and finally stopped, leaving the distant rattle of a bunkering ship, and that alone, to disturb the silence.

The gods had drugged the night. The warm air, the soothing pipe, the comfortable deck chair would have made Cerberus himself nod. The mate's eyes closed, his head sank on his chest. He was three-quarters on the way to slumber, when a faint noise in his immediate neighbourhood startled him. Somebody had passed. He could still hear a quick patter of bare feet. Jumping up he ran along the alley-way, and reaching the forward entrance stood and looked around.

It must have been fancy. Not a soul was visible except the second mate, who, lamp in hand, was bending over the starboard scupper.

"Hallo, there!" Dixon cried. "Has anyone passed your way?"

He distinctly saw the second mate dart out a crooked hand, grab something, and put it under his coat.

"When do you mean?" called out the second mate, rising and turning suddenly.

"Just this instant. I think I heard footsteps."

"You've made a mistake then," returned Skinner, swinging the lantern. "There's been nothing." He paused a moment. "All are aboard," he continued. "I'm going to turn in."

The mate joined him. "Are you quite certain?" he asked.

"Certain as certain," returned Skinner, with some emphasis. "I'm going to my bunk now," he continued. "Good-night to you."

"What were you searching for in the scupper?" asked the mate, looking at him hard.

"I wasn't searching for anything," growled Skinner. "If you want to know, I was seeing how that new cement was holding."

"And how is it?"

"It could do with another coat. . . . Well, I'm turning in."

"All right. But we might go round together and make sure no stowaways have stepped aboard."

The two walked up on to the forecastle head, and back over the well deck, swinging the light into every corner.

"Nothing here," remarked Dixon at last.

"I'm off to my bunk," said Skinner for the third time. There was a note of suppressed excitement in his voice that might well have made the other curious again.

"Very good," said the mate. "Night, night."

"Good-night to you," returned Skinner.

"Rum old bird," soliloquised the mate, returning to his deck chair. "He did find something in that scupper."

I wouldn't mind putting five dollars on it. A bit of scrap brass or something. He's like a magpie."

He lay back and dozed again. He was fast asleep when Captain Porter came on board and found him.

"What's this? What's this?" enquired Captain Porter, poking him repeatedly in the ribs.

"It's me, sir," replied the mate, springing hurriedly to attention.

"Well, don't let it occur again," ordered the captain fiercely.

"Very good, sir," said Dixon.

"Had we been at sea I should have had a good deal more to say," the captain informed him in tones of great severity.

The mate's face expressed no astonishment at the information. He bent his head in silence.

"I should have called you the laziest loungeur that ever walked a bridge," continued the captain. "I should have said that one of these days you'll be drowned without knowing it."

"I've had a tiring day, sir," pointed out the mate diffidently.

"A tiring day! Nonsense!" snorted Captain Porter. "You've never put your foot off the ship. How would you like to be me, paddling around those fiery pavements ashore there all day, like a hen on a hot brick, seeing about freights and documents? Tiring day! Nonsense! You young chaps don't know what work is. When I was your age do you know how much sleep I used to have in a night? Do you know, eh?"

Dixon confessed that he did not.

"Sometimes two hours, sometimes four," said Captain Porter with emphasis.

"Was that when the ship was in harbour, sir?" slyly enquired the mate.

"No, sir, it was not," replied the captain in a sharp tone. He looked hard at the mate's face, but it expressed only an earnest wish for information.

"No, sir," he explained in softer accents. "It was at sea. At sea I was like a sleepless cat. And so will you have to be if you want to get on."

"Yes, sir," said the mate meekly.

"Yes, that's me," said Captain Porter, drawing himself up. "Everything all right aboard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Crew all here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Chief engineer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he make any remark to anyone when he came aboard?"

"Never spoke to a soul but the boatman."

"Ah!" said Captain Porter thoughtfully. "Well, I'm going to snatch a few moments' sleep now. Tell Mr. Skinner to call me at two." He turned and ascended the ladder to his cabin. The mate lit a pipe and walked up and down the deck in a half-hearted endeavour to keep awake.

The night breeze fanned him softly, the gentle lapping of the water against the vessel's sides sounded a lullaby, and presently the moon rose and showed him, among other things, his empty chair patiently awaiting him. It was hard to refuse its hospitality. He sat down, and after a faint resistance closed his eyes and dozed again.

Almost immediately, it seemed to him, another assault was made on his ribs. He looked up and beheld the second mate beside him.

"What's the time?" he murmured, closing his eyes again. There was no reply.

He opened his eyes once more and beheld the second mate leaning over the rail.

"You mustn't come aboard here," that gentleman was shouting. "Get away out of this."

A confused jabbering was heard to be coming from somewhere below.

"Curse these black fellows, anyhow," remarked Skinner irritably. "Why can't they talk English? . . . What do you want?"

Another babel below and again a silence, which Mr. Skinner at once proceeded to soil.

"Anything the matter?" enquired Dixon.

He rose and went to the side. At the foot of the ladder a boat laden with men and luggage was dimly visible, lopping gently up and down.

"*apa itu?*" he called out in Malay.

"It sounds like Spanish," he said to the second mate, after listening to their reply. "They must be passengers who have mistaken the ship."

He leant over the side and spoke to them again.

"They don't seem to understand," remarked Skinner.

"Well, then, we'll pull up the ladder a bit, and let them go to blazes. Turn out your watch. It's nearly one o'clock."

The second mate walked forward, blowing a whistle; a light showed in the forecastle, and presently half a dozen sailors came pattering aft. At the mate's direction they pulled at the fall of the block, and the ladder, despite the loud protests of the gentlemen in the boat, began its slow and jerky ascent.

"*El capitano, el capitano,*" yelled the men in the boat.

Skinner peered over the side again. "Here's another boat," he announced.

"Are you the *Susan Dale*?" shouted somebody in a high, peculiar voice.

"We are," replied Dixon, peering over the side also.

"What do you want?"

A stout man standing in the bow of the boat bent down to consult his two companions.

"Captain Porter knows about us," he answered at last.

"Did he not give you any instructions?"

"No, he didn't," replied the mate.

"Then will you be good enough to arouse him," requested the stout man, "and inform him that Colonel Tingle and his staff are waiting to come on board?"

"Are you passengers?" enquired Dixon.

"Certainly we are," returned Colonel Tingle with dignity. "What do you imagine we are doing out here at this time of night? Fishing?"

There was an angry note in his voice that had not been there earlier in the evening, a melancholy expression about his face when he came on board, which even the sight of Captain Porter in pyjamas failed to alter.

He shook hands very limply with the two mates when they were presented to him, and remarked that he was glad to be leaving Ceylon, a place which in his opinion was full of thieves; but he added that all places were much alike to an old campaigner like himself, who asked for nothing more than a bed, no matter how hard, under the stars.

"That's very lucky, colonel," said Captain Porter jovially. "You'll have to turn in to-night on the saloon table, and your men must make shift there too."

Colonel Tingle, with a melancholy smile, said that for an old campaigner anything would do. He watched his luggage, including a large, flat case, being carried aboard, handed a leather bag to his valet, a small Eurasian, and at the head of his companions followed Mr. Dixon into the saloon.

"You'll excuse the discomfort of the place, Colonel Tingle. Had we known earlier you would have found your cabin ready," said Dixon as he turned to go. "We could

have given your men shakedown in the lazarette adjoining here, but, unfortunately for you, it's chock full of cargo."

"Ah, indeed. What cargo?" asked the colonel politely.

"Barrels of pickled pork for Hong Kong," replied the mate. "Well, good-night."

"What?" asked the colonel in a strained voice.

"Pickled pork," the mate said again. He left the saloon, closing the door behind him. And as he did so he heard the colonel say, in agonised tones: "Put out those cigarettes at once."

CHAPTER VII

"WHY, I thought they were asleep," muttered the mate an hour later, when on going up to the boat deck he caught sight of the two ladies leaning over the rail outside their cabin.

He walked forward quietly, intent on gaining the bridge.

"Oh, there's Mr. Dixon," said Helen, in a voice obviously intended to attract his attention. "Perhaps he can tell us. . . . Mr. Dixon?"

"Yes?" said the mate enquiringly. He made his way to them with reluctant steps and saluted. "I thought you had gone to bed long ago," he remarked.

"The cabin is so very hot," said Helen.

"And it smells so of tobacco, to be perfectly candid," added Mary. "Horrid, strong, nasty tobacco. I'm sure one of your sailors must have been smoking in it." She turned her head away, and looked down at the water.

"I'm very sorry," said Dixon contritely.

"We know the creature must have been there," continued Mary, looking up again. "Because he left his pipe behind. Left it in the most lordly manner on the ledge of the bunk, just underneath my nose. Why . . . why, I might have been found dead in the morning!"

"I might tell you——" began the mate.

"Miss Clatworthy wanted to throw it overboard——"

"I didn't!" exclaimed Helen.

"But I said no," continued Mary virtuously. "I

said, 'Perhaps the poor ignorant creature has only one pipe; it looks like it from the amount of use this pipe has had. Suppose we wash it well and hand it over to Mr. Dixon to return to him.' And Helen said——"

"I never said anything," cried Helen hastily.

"So I tied it to a piece of cotton," said Mary, looking up into the mate's face innocently, "and we've lowered it into the water to let it wash. That was quite right, wasn't it?"

She turned away again and stood huddled together looking over the side. Her bare shoulders were just under the mate's eye. It was plain to be seen that they were shaking.

"But——" he began at last.

"Do you think it will be clean now?" asked Mary in a steady voice.

"It ought to be," replied Dixon shortly.

"Then I'll pull it up." She began to haul in the slender thread over the rail with exaggerated care. "Slowly . . . slowly . . ." she said. There was a slight tap, the sound of a tiny splash. The thread came away loose.

"Oh! . . ." cried Mary, looking up in tremendous concern. "Oh! . . . I am so sorry."

"You were quite right," said Dixon with emphasis. "The pipe was old and much used, but—it was a present, and the owner valued it. Good-night." He touched his hat and walked quickly away.

"But—I am so sorry," Mary cried, running a pace or two after him. "Mr. Dixon!" Without a sign that he heard her he kept his course along the deck.

"I said I was sorry! I said I was sorry!" said Mary in distressed tones.

"You ought not to have done it," Helen told her. "I warned you at the time. Just at the start of the voyage, too. You're always busy with your stupid jokes."

In the cabin as they undressed she continued in much the same strain.

"But if he had not been so bitter at dinner against women who smoke cigarettes, I should never have thought of it," said Mary, looking greatly troubled.

"How was he to know you smoked? If he had he would not have said what he did at dinner."

"That would have been worse," returned Mary, sitting on the edge of the bunk.

The other looked at her and went on plaiting her hair. "You are an impossible girl," she remarked, with a slight laugh.

"He had to take one side or the other," Mary pointed out.

"Well, everybody's the better for a little tact," said Helen Clatworthy ambiguously.

"What do you say, Mrs. Dixon?" asked Mary, addressing the photograph. "What's your opinion on this question of morals? What do you think of your son, now? Isn't he a baby? A great, big, enormous baby, with his tantrums and his poutings and his vapours. Just a mere pipe, Mrs. Dixon, a little bit of wood, Mrs. Dixon. And he smokes himself, and it wouldn't surprise me to hear that he's not a teetotaler either, in spite of all the good advice you gave him, Mrs. Dixon. And you did give him good advice, didn't you? Yes, of course you did. And that's not the worst either. The very worst is the ideas he has got into his noddle about us. He thinks we ought to wheel prams, Mrs. Dixon, and cook, Mrs. Dixon, and scrub and darn socks, Mrs. Dixon, while he sits and smokes like a lord. . . . But don't fret for him, Mrs. Dixon. He's in good hands now. He's in the hands of us!"

"When you've done," said Helen from the bunk, "I want to go to sleep."

"I shan't be a moment." She finished undressing.
"Good-night," she said.

"Good-night." Helen sat up for an instant to turn down the lamp. Silence reigned in the cabin.

"Helen," said Mary softly, after a few minutes.

"Yes?"

"Are you awake?"

"Yes."

"I don't feel a bit sleepy to-night," Mary went on; "and yet we ought to, especially you, after last night's dance."

"We came home early," said Helen Clatworthy.

"Sleep's different from other things," went on Mary.

"The more you have the less you want, and the less you take the less you can get. It is handed round once every night and if you don't help yourself then—well, sometimes there's a scrap left in the larder, and sometimes there isn't."

"Yes," said Helen, in weary tones.

"I wish they sold it," continued Mary. "I wish they put it up in tabloids."

"So do I," said Helen, with emphasis.

"If they did I'd take a dozen now, but as they don't—" she sat up in her bunk—"the next best thing is a cigarette." She drew out a silver case from under her pillow. "Yes, Mrs. Dixon, now that your son can't see, you and I will have a cigarette together."

Helen turned up the lamp. "I can't sleep," she declared. "What heat! And the narrow bunks——"

"Think of our nice spring beds lying empty only half a mile away."

"——And the noises. Listen to that!"

"That's the engines," said Mary knowingly. "That's Mr. Evans, at work at last—the favourite nephew of the beloved matron, the fly round the honey-pot, the——"

"I rather like Mr. Evans," said Helen frigidly.

"I never doubted it."

"We've been friends for a long time, long before you came out. And if it wasn't for that and the fact of his being the matron's nephew we should neither of us have been allowed to come on this steamer."

"I know that."

"Then why try and make fun of him?" asked Helen, with a look of annoyance on her rather peaked face.

Mary puffed at her cigarette. "Listen to that," she said, after a time, as two or three people hurriedly passed outside. "They are going on to the bridge. I think the ship is starting."

The telegraph grated, there was a hoarse shout or two, and then something bumped against the ship, making her tremble slightly. Presently the windlass on the forecastle head started to work with fury.

"Let's put on dressing-gowns and go outside," said Mary excitedly. "Come on. Don't be prudish. We'll go into a corner and nobody will see us."

The engines, with a mighty snort, were making their first revolution as the two girls stepped on deck. For a minute the *Susan Dale* trembled violently, and then, all noise and vibration ceasing, she glided slowly through the harbour, quiet as a piece of driftwood on a lake. She was as though at rest. The world slipped gently by. Lines of dark vessels passed, empty of life; a monster dredger, the sleeping machinery of which towered like a pyramid; grey painted steam cranes with slender jibs squatting on tops of granite piers, still as fishermen; the white moles strewn with gigantic blocks of dressed stones; and the pale water below them, shadowless under the glare of the lighthouses. And the *Susan Dale* with quickening speed crept out into the ocean.

"I shall go to bed now," said Helen, turning from the rail.

"So shall I," said Mary. "But I feel as though I could remain here all night. I always longed to be the fairy in the transformation scene. And it's like a transformation scene to-night."

"Oh, do come," exclaimed the other impatiently. "I don't want to be caught in this get-up."

"Helen," Mary remarked when they were in the cabin again, "you never asked the chief officer what the noise and shouting was we heard about twelve o'clock."

"How could I, when you offended him so about his pipe?"

"Don't the engines thump!" said Mary. "Almost as hard, dear Mrs. Dixon, as your son will thump the table when he lectures his wife. I shouldn't wonder, Helen," she went on, hanging up her dressing-gown, "if the noise we heard wasn't some more passengers arriving."

"Passengers wouldn't make such a fearful shouting," said Helen, from her bunk.

"They might have been saying 'good-bye' to their friends on the quay," suggested Mary. "Or one of them might be deaf, or have lost his luggage. I could give you hundreds of reasons."

"There are no passengers but us," stated Helen. "Mr. Evans distinctly told me so," she added, in a tone of finality. "Good-night."

"Good-night, Helen . . . Good-night, Mrs. Dixon. Farewell, Ceylon, land of palms and perspiration, spices and snakes, Cingalese and centipedes. Farewell, oh, fare thee well! I lay myself down on the bosom of the ocean, by kind permission of Mr. Dixon, and with the tacit approval of the immaculate Mr. Evans. . . . Helen!"

"What?"

"Do you think you could send a note down to ask him to keep the engines from thumping so?"

There was no reply.

"You could put, if you like, 'For Mary's sake' . . . Well, good-night."

There must have been a scrap left in the larder, for in a minute or two the moonlight coming in at a porthole rested on her face and showed her sleeping. Even now her expression had not lost its vivacity. Long black eyelashes made her look half awake. And her small red mouth was smiling, as though even in dreams she still found something to laugh at.

An almost imperceptible rocking indicated that the *Susan Dale* had altered her course and was getting away from the shelter of the land. The breeze blew in faintly past the swaying curtains that were drawn across the doorway. The beat of the engines grew quicker.

Presently the telegraph grated, and they stopped.

"Helen . . . Helen!" cried Mary, instantly awake.

"What is the matter?" enquired the other in a sleepy voice.

"The ship has stopped," Mary answered, looking out of the porthole. "Oh, look at the sky!"

"What about it?"

"You'd like to paint it, I know. An enormous moon sitting on top of a big white cloud—like a snowball . . . Helen!"

"What?"

"Aren't you going to get up?"

"Of course not. I'm sleepy."

"But supposing the moon rolled off that cloud and plopped into the water just in front of us, and you were not dressed?"

"Oh, I do wish you wouldn't talk!" Helen said shortly.

"None of us will get any sleep. It's nearly three o'clock."

"If the moon drops off before four," remarked Mary, in a subdued voice, "I am afraid some of us will get splashed." She kept quiet for almost a minute, looking

out of the porthole. "Very well," she went on, "then I won't talk . . . I won't tell you anything that's going on outside . . . I wouldn't dare to mention that the ship has swung round . . . and that now I can see a launch, such a smart little white launch . . . and there's a boat quite close rowing this way . . . and such a nice . . . No, I don't think I'll tell you that!"

"What?"

"Such a nice old gentleman—not such a very old gentleman, either—standing up and waving his topee."

"Pooh!" said Helen, "that's the pilot. Ships are always stopping for pilots."

"I suppose they are," agreed Mary, lying down again.

CHAPTER VIII

"**W**HAT'S ado now? What's ado now?" rumbled Mr. Bidgood from the darkness, in a tone of mingled complaint and enquiry. "Can't you run the job without worrying me night and day? My word, some of you young fellows aren't fit to be trusted with a hot potater engine, let alone a steam engine."

"We've stopped, sir," explained Mr. Evans. He lit a lamp, revealing the interior of a small cabin, the farther end of which was more or less occupied by the recumbent form of his superior. "They rang 'Stand by' less than three minutes ago," continued the grimy Mr. Evans, wiping his face with a sweat rag, "and 'Stop' right on top of that. I've shut down the dampers, and am pumping cold water into the boilers, to try and keep the steam down, but she blew off in spite of me."

A continuous noise of escaping steam, breathful as the bellow of a bull, confirmed the latter portion of his statement. At an increase of the sound he fled precipitately.

Mr. Bidgood, who was wearing pyjama trousers of violent hue and a very *décolleté* red flannel singlet, sat up on the bunk and rubbed both eyes.

"That's where all my coal goes," he growled, referring to the waste of steam. "Drat this captain, anyhow, with his stoppings and startin's, his 'arf speeds and full speeds. Why can't he leave the telegraph alone? Anyone 'ud

think by the way he's always pullin' the handle of it that he had the hold of a beer engine in some bar or other."

Soliloquising thus, Mr. Bidgood lowered himself slowly off the bunk, turned on a small clockwork fan, and sat down in the armchair facing his desk, to cool himself.

His cabin was a cosy one, and the objects about it accorded with his profession. On the wall, for instance, hung photographs of groups consisting of some seven or eight wooden-looking, mutton-fisted gentlemen in peaked caps, who stood in a row behind a central, seated figure. This seated figure, which at first glance might have been mistaken for an emperor, proved on closer inspection to be Mr. Bidgood. A brass pendulum hung there also ; a graduated strip of brass marked its oscillations and indicated to Mr. Bidgood the trim of the vessel. On the shelves were mahogany gauge cases, engineers' almanacs, and a salinometer or two ; on a side table some well-worn log books and a three-foot rule. The pipe rack had been made from a broken piece of valve cover, and was the life work of a favourite donkeyman who had been struck by lightning immediately after the completion of his masterpiece, the Fates apparently being determined that he should never make another.

The story of this gentleman's accident, just after having presented the pipe rack to Mr. Bidgood and having been promoted from the rank of fireman in consequence, had been told frequently in the little cabin, and many a glass of good liquor had been diluted almost beyond repair by the tears that had dropped from the eyes of kindly-hearted listeners on hearing the lesson that Mr. Bidgood drew from the donkeyman's pathetic fate.

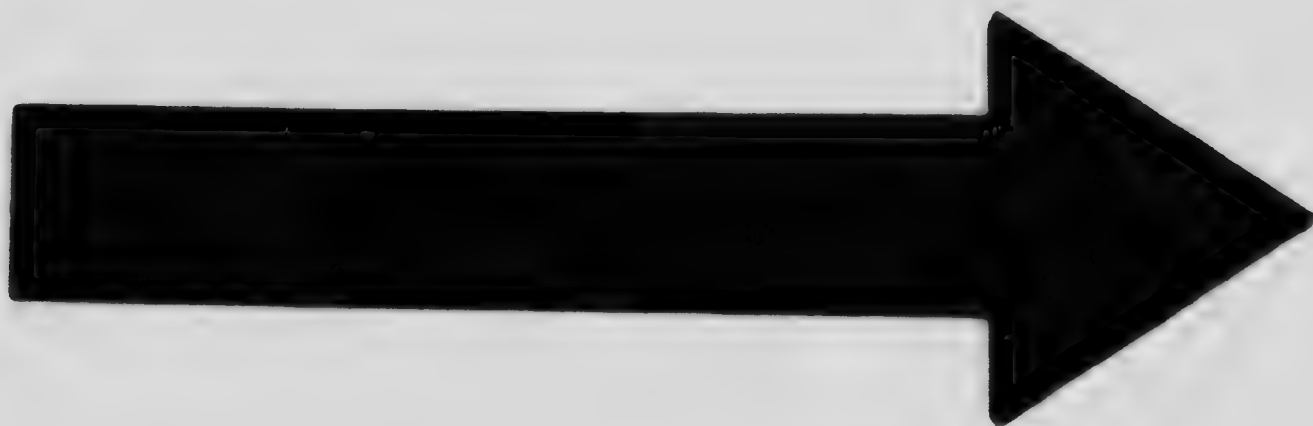
And as the pipe rack had its history, so had the pipes their history, too. None had been bought. All, like children, had been presented. And the tender way in which Mr. Bidgood handled them would have gladdened

a father's eye. There was one in the end hole which had been cracked through falling on its head when first it came into his possession. But he had not hidden it from the eye of visitors or treated it with less favour on that account. No, there it was, as brightly polished and as visible as the rest of them, reserved for lighter work, for short smokes. And the present being a fit occasion for a short smoke, Mr. Bidgood drew out this cripple and proceeded to half fill it from a tin of tobacco that stood on the desk beside him.

He wondered what the time was, and glancing up beheld the corkscrew hanging by the chain from the hook usually occupied by his watch. Habit must have caused him to hang it there the night before; and now the sight of the thing called up a crowd of emotions which he, at that early hour of the morning, when, as everybody knows, vitality is at its lowest, was powerless to overcome. That he did his best the angry puffs of smoke issuing from his mouth regularly as steam from an exhaust pipe gave ample testimony. But even strong tobacco failed to soften the memory of his humiliation on the previous evening. Fresh air seemed imperative. He arose and sought it on the deck.

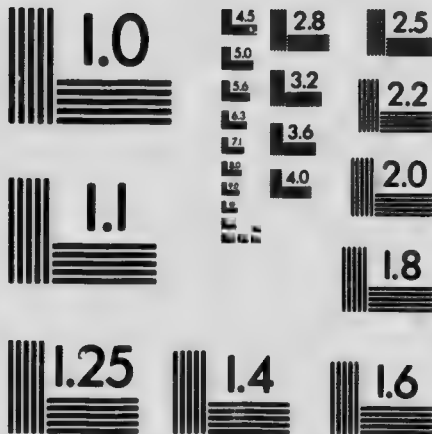
Outside, the naked moon had whitened sea and sky. On the bleached waters some cable's length away there rode a launch from which, even as Mr. Bidgood looked, a boat put out and rowed towards the *Susan Dale*. There were five men in it, four at the oars and one standing at the stern, a man in a white topee who had the appearance of a European.

Down on the horizon the lights of Colombo were visible, pale and forlorn. The scene might have enchained anyone, yet it was curiosity, and not a love of the beautiful, that drew Mr. Bidgood to the side. He had just heard Skinner's voice above, and had gathered that the



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accommodation ladder was to be lowered. Not the ordinary rope ladder kept for pilots and other small fry, but the accommodation ladder. Skinner said it twice.

"That's rum!" muttered the *décolleté* Mr. Bidgood, leaning over the ship's side, his bare arms on the bulwarks. . . . "Dr—at those safety valves." He cast a threatening glance upwards, but in spite of that the steam continued to roar from the waste pipe.

The boat was drawing quickly nearer; the accommodation ladder creaked down. A rope was thrown, and those above hauled the boat inwards to a point beyond the field of Mr. Bidgood's vision.

Ears then took the place of eyes, telling him that one man, and one man alone, had come on board. This information was confirmed a minute or so later when the boat, containing four men only, came into view again on its way to the launch.

Eyes and ears now for the time being useless, Mr. Bidgood had recourse once again to his brain, and arrived at the conclusion that the new-comer must be another passenger. If not, why should the boat have left again without him? Captain Porter, then, not content with fifty-five pounds, was bent on making yet more money; and he, Mr. Bidgood, was to be disturbed at all hours of the night in order to assist him in the process.

"Not if I know it, mister, not if I know it," rumbled Mr. Bidgood. "This 'Stop' goes down in my log, and neither you nor no one else shall hinder it. I'll be upsides with you yet, you low-down son of a sparrow, you!"

"Mr. Bidgood!" roared the captain from above.

"Sir?" responded Mr. Bidgood meekly.

"Kindly be good enough to come to my cabin immediately. Here's a gentleman that wants to see you."

"Very good, sir." Mr. Bidgood stepped back to the cabin and hurriedly changed his attire. The tone of the

captain's voice struck him as friendly in the extreme. The words the captain had chosen seemed almost apologetic in their politeness. Could it be that last night's misunderstanding was to be a misunderstanding no longer ; that the clear, cold morning air had brought contrition to the breast of his superior ? If so, it was nearly too good to be true ; and yet it seemed to be the only possible explanation. With a buoyant step he walked along the deck, and entered the cabin.

An oldish man, a complete stranger, who was sitting there, glanced up and nodded, and then, putting on a pair of eyeglasses, surveyed him. The captain, standing near the bunk, was obviously in difficulties. Mr. Bidgood thought he had never seen him look so ill at ease.

"I called you, Bidgood," he said, "about the weather. What I say is that we're in for a rough trip, and you can back me up when I say it."

So he wanted backing up already, did he, after all he'd done last night ?

"Why should I back you up ?" thought Mr. Bidgood, bristling.

"But I'm sure it's not going to be rough," said the stranger. "I wrote and enquired about it particularly before I left home, and they assured me when I took my ticket that the sea was always smooth during the tourist season. And they can't afford to be wrong. It would ruin their reputation."

"You see, sir," began Captain Porter, "if you were an ordinary——"

"No, no, please, captain," interrupted the other. "Really . . . Mr. Chief Engineer, you are unbiassed. What do you say ?"

It seemed to Mr. Bidgood that there was almost an imploring look on the captain's face. He hesitated. After all . . . old friends . . .

"I should say——" he was beginning slowly, when the captain broke in.

"The responsibility is what I don't like," said the captain eagerly, drumming the table.

"Aye, that's it, the responsibility," echoed Mr. Bidgood, sitting down and looking very serious. He had decided.

"It's a great risk," went on the captain with a relieved air. He cleared his throat, and winked at Mr. Bidgood.

"Aye is it," said Mr. Bidgood loyally. "Weather or no weather. Do you know, mister," he continued, "that if the owner was to find out me and the captain carried passengers, our name would be Walker? That it would, drat 'im."

He shot a satisfied glance at his superior, and received in return a look stupefying in its ferocity.

"Bidgood is talking nonsense, Mr. Todd," burst out the captain. "He knows nothing whatever about it."

"But I'm going," said Thomas Todd, settling his eyeglasses firmly on his nose. "I must go. I've come out to go. Yes, and as I am the owner you must take me. I'm very firm about it. Please tell them to make the ship go on again."

He watched Captain Porter leave the cabin and turned to the chief engineer.

To say Mr. Bidgood was surprised at the turn events had taken would be to say very little. Had somebody stolen his boilers he could not have looked more astonished. That the owner of the *Susan Dale*, a gentleman whom everyone supposed to be safely stowed away in England, should have suddenly appeared on board when the ship was practically in mid-ocean was enough. But that he, Mr. Bidgood, should have had the temerity to drat him was a calamity overwhelming in its intensity. He sat erect on the little cabin chair, mechanically wringing his gold-braided hat, and wondering what was going to happen

next. Whatever happened he felt that he would not be aware of it.

"Mr. Bidgood," said Thomas Todd irritably.

"Sir?" said Mr. Bidgood, sitting more erect than ever.

"If you don't mind, I wish you wouldn't twist about that hat. You'll spoil it."

Mr. Bidgood hastily smoothed the hat out and put it on the table.

"I didn't know the *Susan Dale* carried passengers, went on Thomas Todd. "Dear me!" He took off his glasses and rubbed them. "Have you many passengers this time, Mr. Bidgood?"

"I don't rightly know, sir," Mr. Bidgood replied after some cogitation.

"Well, perhaps the captain can tell me something about it," suggested the owner. "It's so very unfortunate," he went on, "just at this particular time. Dear, dear!" He got up, walked a step or two, sat down, and got up again, Mr. Bidgood all the time in a state of palpitation.

"Mr. Bidgood informs me that he doesn't know how many passengers there are on board," said the owner, directly the captain returned.

"Passengers!" exclaimed Captain Porter from the doorway, his face growing if possible a trifle redder. "Bless my soul, yes. Now I remember. You spoke to me about two young ladies you were taking, chief, didn't you?"

Mr. Bidgood, upset again by this new attack, could only nod his head weakly.

"And also those five or six foreigners I saw you drinking with at the hotel," continued Captain Porter. "I suppose they are on board also?"

"Really, Mr. Bidgood," said Thomas Todd, in a tone of concern. "Dear me, this is very unfortunate."

The chief engineer turned a pathetic eye on Captain Porter and mumbled something in his beard.

"But—I thought it was not allowed, captain," said the owner.

"I always make it a rule not to interfere with the chief engineer, sir," explained Captain Porter virtuously.

"Not that I mind you carrying passengers, Mr. Bidgood," continued the owner, more amiably. "Please don't think that, on any account. So long as the captain allows it and the Board of Trade doesn't interfere. But it's so unfortunate on this occasion."

"There, I knew how these goings-on would upset us, Bidgood," said Captain Porter. "You may rely on me, sir," he added to the owner, "I'll see that he doesn't do it again. And we can put 'em off at Hong Kong and no harm done."

Oh, what a murderous, treacherous, slanderous, oily tongue! And this was the man who had shared his joys and still held a half-interest in all his secrets.

"But we're not going to Hong Kong," said the owner irritably. "That is, perhaps we are not. And in any case I don't think they would let us into the harbour."

"Not let us into Hong Kong harbour!" cried Captain Porter, with an amazed stare. "Why not?"

Mr. Bidgood also furnished an amazed stare, and having nothing to say, said it.

"But we must be going to Hong Kong," continued the captain, respect struggling with surprise in his voice. "The port clearance is made out for Hong Kong, and we can't go anywhere else. That's so, isn't it, Bidgood?"

But the chief engineer made no reply. There were depths here, depths in which both of them were struggling, but if possible he would no longer permit Captain Porter to use him as a lifebuoy.

"I shall defy the port clearance," announced the owner.

"I've made up my mind about it." He glanced from one to the other through his glasses. Then something seemed to dawn on him. "Dear me!" he continued, looking distressed, "I quite forgot for the moment. That was very foolish of me—so hasty. But I was worried about the passengers, and I did not tell you about our change of plans for the ship. Of course you are surprised. I knew you would be. One of my friends told me you would be greatly. But it had to be so. And you must believe me when I tell you how very grieved I am at having to disturb you."

"Don't mention it, sir," said Captain Porter. They both stared at the phenomenon of an apologetic owner. Mr. Bidgood actually felt a little brighter.

"But, as my friend whom I consulted pointed out, there was no other way of doing it. No—no other way, although I tried hard to think of one. You see, Captain Porter, secrecy had to be observed."

"Quite so," agreed the captain, looking particularly stupid.

"And—it seemed to me also that you and Mr. Bidgood had been in our service a long time, and that—that you both could be relied upon to stretch a point."

From the answers both the captain and Mr. Bidgood gave one might have supposed they were made of elastic.

"Anything you like to ask, sir," added Captain Porter.

"Really, that's very kind of you," said Thomas Todd, sitting back in his chair looking much relieved. "Did you—did you say there was whisky in that bottle?"

Both the captain and Mr. Bidgood sprang up to do the honours. The unerring manner in which the latter at once went to a small cupboard and brought out soda-water bottles and an opener looked extremely suspicious, but the owner did not appear to notice it.

He raised his glass ; the two sailors hastened to imitate him. " How time flies," he said.

" It does," said Captain Porter, putting down his glass with a sigh. " Let me see, it must be nigh on ten years since we last saw each other."

" It seems like yesterday," said the owner. " And you, Mr. Bidgood, don't I remember you coming into the office when I was a young man ? "

" I shouldn't have known you," replied the chief engineer. " You're that altered."

" And now—er—er—we're in the midst of war," went on Thomas Todd, eyeing them tentatively. " And for a moment I'm afraid the Russians are getting the worst of it."

" They are," assented Mr. Bidgood.

" But only for the moment," said Thomas Todd. " Everyone in the City is positive that it is only for the moment. You see, the Russians have prestige, and, as you know, Mr. Bidgood, it is very important, prestige."

Mr. Bidgood agreed, and asked when they got it. He said that in the last paper he saw they had captured Mukden, but there was nothing about their having got as far as Pr—— the place Mr. Todd mentioned.

It was evident to him from the owner's hard stare that he had said the wrong thing.

" Not that I'm a bit surprised they got it," he hastened to add.

" Nor me, sir," said Captain Porter, as if determined not to be outdone by a mere chief engineer. " I know the Russians. I've been aboard their ships."

" Friendly like, to have a bit of a snack," explained Mr. Bidgood.

Thomas Todd with an effort ceased staring and began to polish his glasses vigorously.

" I'm—very relieved to hear you are so friendly with

them," he said, after a time. "Dear me . . . er . . . how would you like to be with them now, Mr. Bidgood ? "

"What, off duty, sir ? Having a snack in their cabins ? " asked the chief engineer.

"No, sir," said Thomas Todd, eyeing him intently. "On duty. Having a—er—a smack at the enemy."

Mr. Bidgood glanced up sharply. What could this mean ? The hesitating smile playing about the owner's mouth told him almost at once. It was evidently some sort of quiet joke ; probably the whole business of not going to Hong Kong was a joke. They had been having their legs pulled. It struck Mr. Bidgood that it was a good thing he noticed it. He looked down, smiling modestly.

"Well, we might do worse," he replied. "We might do worse."

"There's nothing I should like better, sir," announced Captain Porter, in a determined voice. "We'd show 'em."

"Aye would we," laughed Mr. Bidgood, entering thoroughly into the fun.

"Indeed ! " said Thomas Todd, looking about him with an expression of intense gratification on his face. "There ! I was firmly convinced about it. I knew you would not fail me. Not that I expect we shall have to run the blockade at Port Arthur, though," he added.

"Port Arthur ! " exclaimed the captain.

"Ha, ha ! " laughed Mr. Bidgood in immense enjoyment. "Got you, captain. Ha, ha, ha ! Well, you're one of the first I've seen have got the captain like that, sir."

"I don't see where I'm got," remarked Captain Porter testily.

Mr. Bidgood glancing at him was surprised to note that his face exhibited considerable consternation. The owner,

too, looked very serious, but then, of course, that was part of the fun.

"But look here, captain," explained Mr. Bidgood impatiently, "can't you see that Mr. Todd is only having his little joke?"

"A joke?" said Thomas Todd, looking rather offended. "No, no. Really! I'm in earnest."

If he was, plainly they had shipped a lunatic. Mr. Bidgood stared at it in dawning horror.

"You can't mean to tell me, mister, that this boat is bound for Port Arthur?" he asked in great anxiety.

"Perhaps not for Port Arthur," replied Thomas Todd hesitatingly, "not, of course, but we may have to go there."

"What, with me on board?" enquired Mr. Bidgood.

As, so far as he could remember, there was nothing in the Board of Trade Regulations for marine engineers about dealing with lunatics, he looked towards the captain.

"What about the women and children?" asked that gentleman, emerging from a reverie.

"Aye, what about them?" echoed Mr. Bidgood, willing to clutch at anything.

"I know, I know," said Thomas Todd eagerly. "But don't worry about that. Personally I think—in fact, I should be almost prepared to guarantee—they will be quite safe. Let me see now——" he produced a paper. "Here are a few notes I have jotted down. Er—see cargo safely on board—er—join *Susan Dale* and interview captain and chief engineer—then inform them that they will be well rewarded—sail for Hong Kong, keeping careful look-out for Russian fleet—if met outside Hong Kong hand over steamer and cargo, getting receipt—if not, sail for Port Arthur, keeping careful look-out for fleets—if Japanese fleet open fire, surrender—if not, wait for fog and enter Port Arthur. Looking at the matter

from a business point of view it seems very simple to me. No danger whatever, although, of course, from a financial point of view, it's a speculation. You see, we rely on a fog."

Apparently it was safe to do that when explaining anything to Mr. Bidgood.

"You quite understand?" asked the owner, noting his bewildered expression.

Mr. Bidgood made a sound that might have meant anything.

"And there's to be a reward, sir?" enquired Captain Porter, who, from the contortion of his low brow, was evidently thinking hard.

"A large reward," said Thomas Todd, looking from one to the other in great anxiety.

"Whether we surrender or not?"

"Yes. I'm covered by insurance."

"We're going to Port Arthur to fight the Roosians—we're goin' to Port Arthur to——" began Mr. Bidgood in a droning voice.

"Nonsense," said the captain. Mr. Bidgood sat up with a start and looked about him.

"My mind's easier, sir," announced Captain Porter. "What you tell us about the women and children has made it easier."

"I'm very pleased about that. . . . And what is your answer?" enquired the owner, rubbing his glasses nervously.

"My answer is, 'I'm your man,'" said Captain Porter in a loud, determined voice.

It was habit, not inclination, that made Mr. Bidgood echo him.

"There!" said Thomas Todd. "I told my friend that you two were to be relied on. Bulldogs of the old school to whom nothing comes amiss; hungry for a fight, I told him you were. He did not believe me."

Neither did Mr. Bidgood, or at least it struck him that his own character, at any rate, had been grossly exaggerated. He said nothing, however, but sat there trying to collect his thoughts. Few in number though they were, he was unable to do so. He seldom could when other people were talking, especially when their conversation so nearly affected him.

"Now suppose your glass to represent the *Susan Dale*," Thomas Todd was saying in answer to a question of Captain Porter's. "And supposing that bottle to be Hong Kong, and that empty tumbler opposite Mr. Bidgood to be the Russian fleet, which we will suppose to be at anchor. Then the course we have is like this: round the back of the bottle—so—carefully avoiding the harbour."

"And supposing the Russian fleet are not there?" enquired Captain Porter, taking Mr. Bidgood's glass away.

"Then we go north after them," explained Thomas Todd, pushing the other glass towards Mr. Bidgood in illustration.

"I see," said Captain Porter, looking particularly owlsh. Mr. Bidgood nodded.

"Unless, of course, we meet the Japanese fleet and they—er—open fire," explained Thomas Todd. "Then—"

"Then, of course, we surrender," said Captain Porter without hesitation.

Mr. Bidgood nodded again.

"I see you both thoroughly understand the position," said Thomas Todd. "I—er—I'm glad you don't object to surrendering. I thought perhaps you would. It's so humiliating."

The two mariners said it was.

"But, of course, you understand that a single shot might blow us out of the water—er—with all these explosives on board."

"With what?" asked Mr. Bidgood in surprised tones.

"Dear me, dear me!" said Thomas Todd, looking dis-

turbed. "This is most inexcusable of me. Er—I intended to have told you—I have a memorandum——" He felt hurriedly in his pockets and brought out another slip of paper. "Let me see now: Six pairs of socks—no—that's my outfit. Here it is. Forward hold, two hundred cases field gun ammunition and Maxim parts shipped as pianos; three hundred cases Maxim ammunition shipped as sewing-machines. In lazarette aft five hundred kegs of gunpowder shipped as pickled pork. . . . Why, Mr. Bidgood!"

The chief engineer had leapt up and was hurrying towards the door.

"Come back and sit down, Bidgood," ordered the captain peremptorily. "Come back, do you hear?"

"Just one minute, please, Mr. Bidgood," said the owner. "I haven't much more to say."

"Why, you're lookin' white," remarked Captain Porter contemptuously, as the chief engineer sat down again. "What are you funky of? Have you never carried explosives before? Hi! that's mine!"

Mr. Bidgood in a dazed way had lifted the tumbler opposite him and drained the contents.

"What did you do that for?" demanded the captain.

Mr. Bidgood gave him a vacant stare.

"Er—I would have told you about this cargo before," went on Thomas Todd, "but I could not see my way to. Secrecy had to be kept up. Even now—in the meantime, I don't want you to reveal what I have told you to anyone on board. And it occurred to me also, 'What need to tell them? For the five hundred barrels of gunpowder, the only really dangerous goods on board, are stowed far away from the boilers——'"

"Two barrels are missing," said the captain, interrupting. "Must have been stolen."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Thomas Todd. "If they are put near a hot place——"

Mr. Bidgood uttered an uncouth noise.

"I hope they blow the beggar what took them sky high," said the captain. "Bidgood . . . sit down !"

"But my engines," gasped the chief engineer.

"Sit down," ordered the captain.

"Let him go," said Thomas Todd gently. "We can talk over our plans to-morrow. Good-night, Mr. Bidgood."

But the chief engineer did not hear him. He heard nothing ; he saw nobody. "Drat it . . . Drat it," he muttered as he sped along the deck. "Drat it . . . Drat it !"

His engines might have needed him, but he took no notice of them. It was his turn to watch, but he watched not. Down the ladder he slid, over gratings, over the chequered platforms, round to the boilers, where he stooped, and in an agony tore at one of the iron plates that covered the floor.

He hadn't meant to do it ; he had never done it before ; he would never do it again. They might have known he was fond of pickled pork. Why did they want to leave the barrels so near the engine-room door ?

They were not very hot yet : he could feel them. He flung the plates back, and sweating and trembling, groping on hands and knees, he brought first one small barrel and then another out of the dim hole, and rising, carried them through the empty engine-room and hid them in the waste locker.

CHAPTER IX

THE sun was shining like a headlight through the porthole when Mr. Bidgood awoke. The lamp, which had illumined the cabin so brilliantly the night before and which he had forgotten (one cannot think of everything) to extinguish, had long ceased to strive against its glorious rival, and, as if determined not to lack attention, had begun to smoke instead. It was this smoke and the smell of burning accompanying its formation that caused Mr. Bidgood to roll alertly from his bunk.

Generally a considerable time elapsed between his first opening of one eye to admit the light of another day and the final moment when the will overcame the flesh and he sprang from the bedclothes as from a chrysalis. It was his habit to lie and let the light filter in through a half-closed eyelid, gradually increasing the dose as he felt his brain was able to bear it. In short, he was one of those people who insist on manufacturing their own dawn, no matter what the time of day.

But on this morning he awoke with a new instinct astir within him, or rather an instinct which years of familiarity with boilers had almost slain. He, Henry Bidgood, First Class Board of Trade Certificate, No. 00001, awoke to find himself in mortal dread of fire.

Not that he recognised this development all at once. It was some time before the truth was forced upon him. And

then he would scarcely admit it, trying always to find other reasons for his frequent agitation. The trembling of his hands, for instance, as he extinguished the smoky lamp, was due to his recent stay in port ; the fact of his not wanting his usual morning pipe to a similar cause ; and when a little later he spoke severely to the cook about the dangerous condition of the galley fire, and nearly hit a fireman because the ashes had not been quenched sufficiently before being thrown overboard, he, excusably enough perhaps, put his new-born zeal for the safety of the ship down to the fact that a bright light was now beating about him, the light from the eye of the owner.

Mr. Todd was in the captain's drawing-room, on the poop, in fact. His figure, as he leant against the rail and talked to a lady whose skirt only was visible, had been the first thing to come under Mr. Bidgood's notice when, after dressing, he had emerged from the cabin. Under the stimulating influence of that grey back he had performed prodigies during the morning, and performed them on the run. It must have been apparent to all on board—if they were blind it was not his fault—that the engineering department of the *Susan Dale* had at its head a man who, like the blue-bottle fly, managed to exhibit a marvellous energy in spite of obvious personal disadvantages.

"Who is that stout gentleman down there, Mr. Todd ?" asked Helen Clatworthy. "I have watched him rushing to and fro for some time, and now he seems to be busy about that piece of machinery."

"Which ?" asked Thomas Todd, turning, and adjusting his glasses. "Oh, that's Mr. Bidgood, our chief engineer."

Mr. Bidgood having settled for an instant on the after winch and discovered that it wanted overhauling, was now preparing to do what was necessary. A Chinaman, clad in faded dungaree, could be seen disappearing through the engine-room door in search of tools.

"How interesting. I have never seen an engineer at work before," said Mary Amerton. "Come and look, Helen. This must be what Mr. Evans does."

All three of them leant on the rail and watched the stout gentleman roll up his shirt sleeves, and, with an expression on his countenance like that of the Laocoon, plunge one arm into the midst of some greasy pinion wheels at the forward end of the machine.

The extremely dirty condition of this arm when he withdrew it gave the ladies much concern. Mary Amerton said that although some of her relatives were soap manufacturers, she did not think any man ought to be allowed to soil himself like that.

"Really," said Mr. Todd. "Really . . . I can quite imagine that there are people who find it very interesting. Some very fine men I know of have done that sort of work in their time."

The chief engineer of the *Susan Dale*, it was plain to be seen, found his work interesting too, and also very important; so important, in fact, that he had to give his undivided attention to it, regardless of the hot sun that beat on his broad back, and oblivious of his surroundings. There was something seriously wrong with the winch, judging from the number of tools that the Chinese fireman brought back. It was a lucky thing that there was somebody on board able and eager to repair it, somebody who didn't mind lying on it or under it or in the middle of it, somebody who didn't mind a little dirt on the path of duty.

"Oh, how can you let him do it, Mr. Todd?" said Mary after a while. "He ought to be stopped. An old man like that!"

"Dear me, do you think so?" asked the owner hesitatingly. "But he seems so fond of it, and it may be necessary!"

"But it isn't necessary for him to crawl round and round

on his hands and knees like that," argued Mary. "Not that I think it will do him much harm!"

"Here comes Mr. Evans," she said a minute later. "I shall ask him why he's not helping too. . . . How do you do, Mr. Evans?" She nodded to the young man who, extremely spruce in a white suit, was on his way aft, evidently with the intention of joining them. There was no need for her to interfere.

At the sound of her voice Mr. Bidgood, who had spent the last two minutes in a vain attempt to tighten a drain-cock, rose to his feet and anticipated her.

"Ho, there!" he cried in displeased tones. "And where may you be gallivanting off to?"

The onlookers at the rail saw the second engineer halt, watched him turn round in a helpless manner and advance with lagging steps towards the dirty piece of machinery, and the guardian who hovered about it.

"Do you want me, sir?" they heard him enquire.

"Just lend a hand, Evans," said Mr. Bidgood loudly. "This winch wants goin' over. It'll break down if we don't watch her, and we can't do with breakdowns aboard here."

He stood aside, and assumed the true function of a chief engineer, that of director. He felt extremely irritated. It seemed as though the morning's work was wasted, that the dainty appearance of his second engineer had gone far towards dissipating the atmosphere of efficiency which he, Mr. Bidgood, had done his best to create. To walk before his owner clad in dirt and perspiration was one thing; to do so while a subordinate remained in a state of cleanliness was another. It was an article of faith with him, as he had often informed all and sundry, that no second engineer could get washed before nightfall and at the same time do his duty. And here was Evans, who had hitherto shewn not a symptom of disagreement with these views,

choosing the most inopportune moment possible to flaunt the uniform of insubordination. For that was what the white suit amounted to. A nice sort of rig for a second engineer in the morning! And with the owner looking on, too.

Mr. Bidgood, with a side glance at the poop, bent down, and pointing to an almost inaccessible bolt, ordered the wearer of the white suit to tighten it.

"Hard at it, I see, Mr. Bidgood," said Thomas Todd loudly.

Mr. Bidgood, mopping his forehead, turned and perceived the owner.

"Good-morning sir," he responded. Disconnecting himself from the winch he advanced towards the poop. "Yes, we find plenty to do aboard this craft."

The owner introduced him to the two ladies, and he at once proceeded to struggle up the steep, short ladder that separated him from them.

"So nice of you," remarked Mary Amerton when he reached the top and joined them.

"What is, miss?" asked Mr. Bidgood, not knowing which of his achievements she might have hit on.

"Bothering to struggle up that steep ladder just in order to come and speak to us," explained Mary, smiling at him.

"They are so trying in the heat, aren't they?"

"Oo—ah!" muttered Mr. Bidgood, considering. It seemed to him rather a tactless remark, liable to create a bad impression about his activity. "Ladder or level, it's all the same to me," he added.

"Indeed," said the owner. "Custom is everything, no doubt about it. . . . I suppose you go up and down quite a number of ladders every day and never feel the worse?"

"Ay, in and out, up and down, that's my programme," returned Mr. Bidgood. "Sometimes I feel more like a squirrel than an engineer. I'd like to see this young lady

do the climbing I have to do in a day's work." He fixed a displeased eye on Mary.

"I should just love to," retorted Mary.

"It'd kill you," returned Mr. Bidgood shortly.

"I don't think it would."

"Why, Mary," interposed Helen Clatworthy, "Mr. Bidgood ought to know. Remember, he was running up and down ladders years before you were born."

"Eh, what?" exclaimed Mr. Bidgood indignantly.

"No, I wasn't."

"I'm sorry," said Helen. It was plain from her tone that she saw he felt hurt. "Of course Miss Amerton is very young."

"And so is our chief engineer, here, Miss Clatworthy," pointed out the owner. "I've known him almost since he was a boy. He and I are—well, I suppose we might consider ourselves in the prime of life, Mr. Bidgood?"

So that was all right. Mr. Bidgood agreed, and casting an eye round to see if anyone was observing two old friends, both of them in their prime, caught sight of a solitary gentleman seated on a bollard at the stern. The solitary gentleman raised his hat with an appearance of great cordiality. Mr. Bidgood, being in the company of the owner, acknowledged the salute distantly.

"You know that gentleman, then?" enquired Thomas Todd.

"Yes, sir, well enough to pass the time of day with," admitted Mr. Bidgood. "His name is Tingle. He's a bit of a job soldier, from what he says. A rum sort, if you ask me anything."

"He looks a most mysterious, interesting man in that big Spanish hat of his," remarked Helen Clatworthy. "Almost what one would imagine a conspirator to be like."

"I'm sure he's hatching something," said Mary. "He's

been sitting on that piece of iron all the morning. I've seen broody hens much less persevering."

"Mary!" exclaimed Helen in a shocked voice.

"I think one of us ought to go and speak to him. He looks so lonely," continued Mary, laughing. "Can't you get him to come and join us, Mr. Bidgood?"

The chief engineer looked enquiringly at the owner.

"I should be very pleased if you would," said Thomas Todd.

Mr. Bidgood alertly put two fingers in his mouth and whistled. "Hi!" he shouted. "Come over here; you're wanted."

It was a pleasure to Mr. Bidgood, in the company as he was of the owner, to notice the speed with which even this stranger obeyed his instructions. The colonel's manner on being introduced seemed perhaps a shade gloomy. This was no doubt due to shyness and would soon pass away like a cloud from the face of the sun. If it did not, he, Mr. Bidgood, would blow it away.

And it was so. In five minutes, with his assistance, they were all chatting gaily. He was able to make a halt in his labours, and to stand aside for a moment surveying the scene and congratulating himself inwardly on his extraordinary social talent.

Things were shaping very well. He could hear the engines from where he stood, and knew from the sound of them that they were doing their best. The deck machinery was under repair, as anyone might see who cared to. A clear, light smoke issuing from the yellow funnel indicated that the firemen were attending to their duties. Another smaller cloud above the galley chimney proved that the cook was attending to his. Before him was this gaily attired group, now in the best of humours. The very ocean sparkled. And what did all this spell if not efficiency? Really, when one came to consider matters it was almost

time he had a rise in wages. And with an owner like Mr. Todd he would not stand such a bad chance either. Quite an old sport, the owner. A bit of a lady's man, too, it was plain, and after all, this fair-haired one was a fine, strapping wench. The other he did not care so much about. Her looks were all right, but her disposition was all wrong, it seemed to him. She appeared to be a sort of teaser, likely to lead men on—a woman, in fact, that it behoved him, Mr. Bidgood, to be careful about, as it would not do to get his name up when the owner was aboard; although on a more suitable occasion—well, one could never tell.

There was something about her face that brought back old memories. Where had he seen its like before? "She's not far off that housemaid at Brighton," muttered the watching Mr. Bidgood, after a minute or two.

He chuckled to himself reminiscently, and full of curiosity continued to observe Mary Amerton, intent on gathering more exactly wherein lay her likeness to his former acquaintance. The bend of her head when she looked at anyone, her wide smile, and the way she used her eyes, all recalled Brighton, but it was in her ever-ready tongue, he decided, that she most resembled the housemaid.

"Full of chat, so she is," whispered Mr. Bidgood to himself. "What's this?" The smile he wore disappeared suddenly on seeing her produce a silver cigarette-case.

"Have one, Mr. Bidgood?" she enquired, flourishing it in front of him. Mr. Bidgood waved it away with a look of horror. He was pleased to note that Colonel Tingle and the owner did the same.

"Would you care for a chocolate instead?" she asked politely. Mr. Bidgood gave her a frigid refusal. She selected a cigarette and lit it.

Mr. Bidgood at once stamped on the discarded match.

"I never smoke at sea," explained Colonel Tingle in

excuse for his abstention. "The air of the ocean and the taste of tobacco, although delightful separately, do not appeal to me in combination. On land, now, especially during a campaign, I am never, except, of course, when eating, without one of the strongest cigars between my lips. Busy or idle, solitary or with my comrades, it makes no difference; I must smoke. Most people's cigars go out when they do any continuous speaking, but mine never does. I seem to be able to do both together, almost automatically, to the wonderment of many people with whom I have come in contact. Dom Pedro, the late emperor, for instance, used to be absolutely astonished at me. 'Be careful, Tingle,' he has said on more than one occasion when I have been giving him my views at length on the policy of the government, the political situation, or what not, 'be careful Tingle, or your cigar will go out.' But it never did."

"Extraordinary," murmured Thomas Todd politely.

"As for the ladies," continued Tingle, lifting his hat and addressing Mary Amerton, "nobody enjoys seeing them inhale the vapour from the fragrant weed more than I do. Nevertheless, señorita, I do not know if you are aware of what a dangerous effect the combination of ozone and nicotine has on the complexion?"

"I never heard of that," said Mary, pausing with the cigarette half-way to her lips. "Are you sure?"

"I had it from the empress herself," asseverated Colonel Tingle, looking round at the company. "As we were stepping into the state barge one morning, on our way to the royal yacht, I noticed her throw away the stump of her cigarette. I asked her the reason. She told me. She said very few people knew about it."

Nobody was more surprised than Colonel Tingle to learn that Mr. Bidgood was one of those few.

"Can it be possible, Mr. Bidgood," he asked eagerly,

"that you have met some of the late empress's *entourage*?"

Mr. Bidgood explained that he had been told the secret by a housemaid at Brighton. The colonel looked disappointed. There was an awkward silence.

"Well, I smoke very little, myself," remarked Thomas Todd, taking up the conversation again.

"And me not at all," said Helen Clatworthy.

They looked at each other. It seemed, to Mr. Bidgood at any rate, another bond between them.

"Quite right, miss," said he, edging away from Mary. He had to take one side or the other.

"You must have had some interesting adventures, Mr. Tingle," remarked Helen. "I hope that when you feel inclined you will tell us a few of them."

"About the Brazilian court," added Mary breathlessly. "I should love to hear. Have you been long away from home?" She stared at the small, stout figure with great interest.

The colonel squared his shoulders and took a deep breath. "Home!" said he simply, "home! I have no home, *señorita*."

"Oh, I am sorry!" exclaimed Mary.

"Unless you consider the word 'home' to mean the whole of the continent of South America," continued the colonel vigorously. "Place me on the mosquito-haunted littoral of the Orinoco! Put me on the topmost pinnacle of the Andes! I shall be at home there, on the soil I adore, breathing the air I love! Freedom's bird!"

"Really," said Thomas Todd, putting on his eyeglasses and staring in a puzzled way. "Really, I thought—er—do you know Peckham?"

It seemed to Mr. Bidgood that the colonel's shoulders drooped, and that his face changed a little.

"Peckham?" muttered the colonel. "Peckham?"

"A suburb of London," explained Mr. Todd apologetically. "I see you have never heard of it. That's very strange. Er—I used to know someone of your name there once. Perhaps it was a relation."

"It couldn't possibly have been," said the colonel, very decidedly. "No near relation, no, certainly not. Some offshoot of a younger branch of our family might be established there, but my own people have been out of England for generations."

"Indeed?" said Thomas Todd. "Really? I hope I have not been inquisitive? The name made me ask. It's a rather uncommon name."

"We left England about the time of the Wars of Roses," explained the colonel. "Both parties were continually pestering my ancestor to join them, and he, so far as I understand, got tired of it and decided to settle abroad."

"Where did he settle?" asked Helen Clatworthy.

"In Brazil, of course," replied the colonel.

"I see," said Helen, looking mystified.

"Do you grow Brazil nuts in your garden?" enquired Mary with deep interest.

"I believe there are one or two trees in the shrubbery," replied the colonel. "In fact, as everything that grows in Brazil grows in my garden, I may say for certain that there are. But these matters my steward could give you more information about than I can. I personally am more interested in swords than spades, the best part of my life having been spent in the camp."

"What, fighting?" Mary asked eagerly.

"Of course," said the colonel shortly, plainly annoyed that anyone should suppose otherwise.

"And you've actually been in battles and killed men?"

"We soldiers don't speak of these matters, my dear señorita," returned the colonel; "but I may tell you that

on one occasion I slew twenty of the enemy with my own sword. The rest fled."

The appearance of a Chinese "boy" carrying dishes reminded Mr. Bidgood that it was time to descend to his cabin and remove the stains of toil. For the past five minutes he had been feeling rather out of it. There were interesting passages in his own career which, if related, would have had the effect of transferring the attention of the company to himself. He had thought of several while standing there, but had been forced to discard them, the scene invariably being laid in a public-house. It was galling, but no matter! Doubtless something suitable would occur to him while washing. So he left them still busy questioning the hero from Brazil, and went below.

When he came on deck again he found the owner and the two ladies gone, and the colonel, as was his wont, in sole possession of the field. It appeared from what the warrior said that he was still thirsting for blood, this time for that of Captain Porter.

"He has put me and Señor Canaba in a dirty little kennel in the alley-way, next door to the second mate," he told Mr. Bidgood. "And as for my men, they're packed in next door to us like sardines. That isn't at all what I bargained for, as you may recollect."

"You'll shake down, I make no doubt," returned Mr. Bidgood soothingly.

"My valet, Bunn, is ill because of it," continued the colonel, fuming. "He could scarcely hold a razor this morning. How he will dress me for dinner to-night I do not know."

"Ah, well," said Mr. Bidgood, "we'll not let that worry us. Let's away down and have some tiffin."

He led the colonel to the saloon.

CHAPTER X

HAD the sun that afternoon, instead of attempting to burn a hole through the *Susan Dale's* awning, descended in an instant and peered beneath it, he would have found most of those on board asleep. Strewn about the decks from stem to stern men lay prone with loosened clothes and sprawling limbs; some breathing heavily, some moving restlessly, others motionless as though slain; all of them, sleeping or waking, longing for the fiery tyrant of the tropics to step from his throne and leave the world for another night.

Not a breath moved the air, not a cloud flawed the sky; the heat was terrific, and through it all, over a burnished ocean, the *Susan Dale* forged her way, leaving a milky trail behind her.

Forward on the forecastle head the crew, in clothing abridged to the limits of decency, lolled on mats or sat leaning against the windlass, the ventilators, or any odd piece of iron or wood that offered their brown backs a resting-place. For the most part they were asleep, as were the Spaniards on the hatch, the hens in the hen-coops, the captain in his chart room, the rats, the cockroaches, the chief engineer, Helen Clatworthy, and Mary Amerton.

Mary had taken as a couch the mate's long chair on the poop, and to her, first of all, the sun paid court. Vicious rays, advancing slowly over the quarter and across the decks, driving the shadows before them, kissed her tiny feet.

She moved unconsciously at this, and then with her head resting on her outstretched arm sank back again. And the libertine crept on, the deck seams softened, the yellow cane chair began to glitter. At last half her form was in a fiery embrace. But still she slept, a flush on her cheek, her hair all disarranged.

"Miss Amerton," said a hesitating voice.

She opened her eyes and half raised herself.

"I thought I would wake you," said the mate distantly.

"I hope you don't mind. You're in the sun."

"So I am," said Mary, standing up. "Thank you very much." She put her hand to her hair mechanically, and smiled.

"I can easily move the chair," the mate said, and went on before her, pushing it along the deck. Mary's two hands at once became busy with her hair.

"Will that do?" asked the mate, turning. Mary's hands dropped.

"That's an awfully good place," said Mary. She said it very gratefully. There was a tinge of meekness in her voice. "How nice it is to have people to wait on one," she said, and smiled again, this time a little wistfully.

She sat down.

"What about this cushion?" asked the mate in unbending accents.

"Oh, I can manage it," said Mary hurriedly. "Don't trouble, please don't trouble."

But the mate, with the air of a polite chief officer of a liner on duty, insisted. Mary leant back, and he, having made a passenger comfortable, moved on.

"Mr. Dixon," she cried after him in a little voice. "Er . . . isn't it fearfully hot?"

"Very hot," the mate replied from the distance. "It always is at this time of afternoon. It will be cooler later." He turned away.

"Mr. Dixon," said Mary again, and bit her lip to hide a smile. He came closer. "Are you very busy this afternoon?" she asked.

"Well—no. To tell you the truth, not very busy."

"Isn't it fearfully hot?" said Mary, trying to fan herself with a tiny handkerchief. She looked up, and gave away another smile.

"Let me try and make you a fan," said the mate, suddenly, for some unexplained reason, eager. He ran along the deck, and Mary's smile as she gazed at his back became at once a great deal wider and more self-satisfied. But when he returned, feverishly twisting a newspaper into some weird shape or other, the smile was a small and tender thing again. It might have been the smile of a violet.

"Will this do?" asked the mate, in reference to the newspaper, fanning her, and a little red in the face after his exertions.

Mary gazed at it and said it would. How men, especially those who were away all the time at sea, learnt to be so deft with their fingers passed, so she remarked, her comprehension.

"I suppose it comes natural," said the mate.

"Perhaps it does," Mary agreed. "I never thought of that." She looked up at him with humble eyes.

"I always had a sort of gift for fashioning things," pursued the mate. "People have often wondered why I didn't go in for engineering."

"Is that so?" said Mary, appearing very interested.

"Yes," said the mate. "Carpentry. Why, I remember I was always making rabbit hutches."

"Did you keep rabbits?" asked Mary.

"Any amount of them—lops."

"Lots; how nice! So does my brother."

"Not lots—lops—the ones with drooping ears,"

explained the mate, smiling. "As a matter of fact, I only had two. But they were prize bred."

"My brother has about twenty," Mary told him. "Isn't it nice when you meet people to find you have some interest in common?"

"It is," agreed the mate enthusiastically. "Though, as a matter of fact, I sold my rabbits," he added, glooming a little.

"That does not matter," said Mary. "The interest is still there. I used to go and feed my brother's rabbits every morning. Haven't you any pets at all on board?"

"There are some fowls—not mine."

"But your own?"

"We aren't allowed to keep any."

"What a shame," said Mary. "But of course you have the sailors."

"The sailors?" said the mate, looking puzzled. He stopped fanning her.

"I shall go and feed them every morning," cried Mary, suddenly bursting into laughter. "Oh—oh—in their forecabin; and you shall carry a bag of buns, and the captain must be put in a cage and you shall scratch his head and say 'Poor Poll,' I mean 'Porter,' and I will give him lumps of sugar with drops of rum on them, and——" she glanced up and saw the mate's face.

"Put the captain in a cage?" said the mate, looking aghast.

"Yes—only in fun, you know."

"Of course, but—I say," he added, "it wouldn't do for him to hear you. Put Porter in a cage—just fancy!" he muttered.

"You see, it's a joke," demanded Mary.

"Of course," said the mate doubtfully.

"Make a joke, to a moke, and you're sorry you spoke,"

said Mary. "' Moke,' of course, being the Anglo-Saxon for donkey. Are you fond of poetry, Mr. Dixon?"

The mate said he was, but didn't know much about it.

"I am, as I daresay you notice," said Mary, laughing.

"Yes."

"Don't say you said you were fond of it just out of compliment to me."

"No," said the mate seriously, "I'd never do a thing like that. I'm not that sort at all . . . For instance —" he went on after a moment's pause, and then hesitated.

"Well?" said Mary gaily.

"For instance—er—" went on the mate. "For instance, last night at dinner I said I hated women smoking— and —and—" he looked uncomfortable.

"Go on," said Mary, her smile all gone.

"I—I—well, I didn't know you smoked then," went on the mate, "but if I had"—he plunged—"it wouldn't have made any difference."

"That's very good of you."

"Of course I may be a bit old-fashioned."

"Not at all."

"But most men hate to see women smoking. It seems so unwomanly."

"Do you object to curl papers?" asked Mary bitterly, "and have you seen those excellent soup-tureens which turn upside down and make bird-cages at night?"

"Soup-tureens?"

"When you marry, never let anything in your house smoke except the kitchen chimney," she went on, standing up. "By the way, isn't this your chair?"

"Yes," said the mate, looking bewildered.

"I am sorry to have kept you out of it so long. Good-afternoon." With a curt nod she left him standing and walked to her cabin.

Helen was asleep. She tiptoed in, and sitting down on

the settee stretched out a foot and gazed fixedly at it. And thus she sat for five minutes, more or less, her face, at first as angry looking as it knew how to be, growing every minute brighter, until in the end she smiled.

"Tut, tut," she said. "And likewise, pooh, pooh. Now, being a deserving person, I'll offend again." She got up softly and going over to the bunk came back with a cigarette.

"You see, Mrs. Dixon," she whispered, addressing the photograph on the wall, "the way we light a cigarette is this. First of all"—she tapped it against the silver case—"we do this to make sure the manufacturer has not left any nails in. Then"—she put the cigarette in her mouth and lit it—"so, with a sudden seriousness, and the little finger of the right hand pointing outwards. Very simple, you see, my dear Mrs. Dixon. Yes, I'm glad you like the smell. It's good tobacco." She lounged back on the settee and smoked in silence. The thin blue smoke curled and feathered up towards the white ceiling, and curving, sailed slowly out through the open porthole.

"So your son takes after his father, does he, Mrs. Dixon?" she mused, looking at the photograph. "Well, well, he has your face; he can't have everything. I believe he'd like everything. No, no, I don't. I give him credit for something. He's not very selfish, is he, Mrs. Dixon? Of course not. He's only a little of an egoist, and very, very stupid; and dear me, Mrs. Dixon, what sort of a world would it be if men weren't like that? If we weren't in the mountains they'd never learn to climb. And but for the climb what would we be worth to them? Tell me that, Mrs. Dixon. Ah, you smile. Your husband found it a steep ascent? And so will your son, I'm afraid. He won't be able to bring much luggage with him. Things like jealousy, prudishness, frumpishness . . . he may have to crawl on his hands and knees. Not that it's anything to do

with me, Mrs. Dixon. Of course not—oh no. I am on the mountains, sometimes. But it's sometimes cold up there, and then—well, I'm afraid—don't tell anyone, Mrs. Dixon—I am afraid I sometimes come down. So you'll understand, Mrs. Dixon, that I'm only talking to you as a friend—and well-wisher. And if you should happen to look outside one day, and see your son crawling about on his hands and knees—well, Mrs. Dixon, you'll know that he's only training, and that it's all for his good."

She smiled, and going softly from the cabin, flung the end of her cigarette over the side. It fell in a curve and, touching the pale, sparkling water near the side, floated rapidly away.

"And so shall I also," she murmured. . . . "What a thought for a sunny day."

The sun was now half-way down the sky, which had taken on a deeper blue. Far away on the clear horizon a feather of smoke was visible, faint as a smudge on a window pane. Sailors were astir at the bows, and from above came the light footfall of somebody pacing the bridge. Presently eight bells struck. Mary ran back to the cabin.

"Helen!" she cried, going over to the bunk.

"What?" said Helen, barely awake.

"Do you know what time it is?"

"No."

"Nor do I," said Mary, "so I thought I'd wake you and ask."

Helen, looking irritated, closed her eyes again.

"It must be very late," Mary persisted. "I heard the tea-bell ring, and I saw a small half-caste in uniform carrying a tea-tray along the deck. It must have been Colonel Tingle's servant."

"Very well then," said Helen; "I'll get up. You might draw the curtain. I didn't know Colonel Tingle had a servant on board. I hadn't seen one."

They saw him that evening, for at dinner a small figure hovered behind the colonel's chair, and much to the secret annoyance of Mr. Bidgood, insisted on seeing that the colonel's tumbler was never empty.

It was a time of stress and worry for the chief engineer of the *Susan Dale*. Dinner-parties there had often been in that saloon, but they had been mere informal affairs, with men as guests, and shirt-sleeves the only wear. This was a very different occasion, a condition new in his experience, the kind of function he had often read of but never for a moment pictured himself as taking part in. How often before had he sat on that very chair and commented caustically to Captain Porter upon the innate unreason of those people who, according to the illustrated papers, made a practice of constricting their persons with stiff linen when they took a meal? How often had he vowed that, not even to oblige royalty, would he be persuaded to follow their example?

Yet there he was sitting at the end of the table caged in a boiled shirt, with one of the captain's white mess jackets clawing his shoulders, and with an attempt at a parting in his hair. What struck him most of all was the fact that everyone seemed to think he was used to it. He felt he would die rather than undeceive them.

"Your health, Mr. Bidgood," said Tingle from the middle of the table, emptying his glass.

"The same to you, sir," returned Mr. Bidgood, nodding stiffly, with one eye on the owner, who, he noticed with a qualm, was drinking water.

The colonel raised a forefinger to indicate to the indefatigable Bunn that his glass was now filled exactly as high as he liked it, namely, to the brim.

"Thank you, Mr. Bidgood," he said. "I hope we shall have many more similar opportunities of doing each other honour. It is an old and courtly custom," he continued,

looking majestically round the table, "that I for one would be very sorry to see die out."

The diners, busy with their soup, murmured sympathetically.

"And yet I believe it would die out," went on the colonel, "but for the efforts of worthy gentlemen like Mr. Bidgood here, who, I take it, is one of the old school, a man who likes a glass of good wine and is not afraid to say so."

Having bestowed this meed of praise, the colonel turned to the soup, and, judging from the celerity with which he worked his spoon, found it worthy also. Like the rest at the table he was attired in evening dress, but while the shirt fronts of the other men were plain, his was adorned with the pale blue ribbon of some order.

Until then this ribbon had monopolised all eyes. Now Mr. Bidgood felt them on him, especially Mr. Todd's.

"I do like the old school, with their courtly old-world manners, don't you?" he heard Mary Amerton saying at his elbow.

Mr. Bidgood again bowed stiffly, and felt the perspiration growing on his forehead.

"I can picture you among those glorious, jolly cavaliers," continued the young lady enthusiastically, "holding your long glass on high and shouting 'Hurrah for King Charles!' Can't you?"

"I can't say that I can," said Mr. Bidgood shortly. He cast an annoyed glance around to see if anyone else could, and was horrified to perceive that the owner was regarding him curiously.

"He does look like a cavalier, doesn't he, Mr. Todd?" demanded Mary.

"Well, really I hardly think that," replied Thomas Todd, adjusting his glasses. "But, if you don't mind me saying so, Mr. Bidgood, as you sit there in that jacket

you do bear a very strong resemblance to a very important personage. Very strong."

Mr. Bidgood had not blushed for years, but the fixed stare of those eight pairs of eyes made him feel as though he was doing so.

"I know who you mean," cried Mary eagerly. "John Knox."

"No," said Thomas Todd, with a smile. "Guess again."

"Pharaoh?"

"No—not quite right."

Mr. Bidgood felt it was time he gave the jacket back to Captain Porter.

"Will you let me make an attempt?" asked Helen. "I should say," she continued, "Don Carlos, yes, decidedly Don Carlos."

"So he is," exclaimed Tingle excitedly. "I knew His Highness personally . . . that is, I saw him when in Brazil, and really the resemblance is remarkable, is it not, Canaba?"

"Very remarkable," concurred the señor, after a hard stare.

"I always said Bidgood looked like a dago," remarked Captain Porter, "and now he can see I was correct."

"When did you say it?" demanded Mr. Bidgood in an irritated tone.

"Often," returned Captain Porter. "Haven't I, Dixon?" The mate replied as was expected of him.

"Ho, did you?" said Mr. Bidgood bitterly. "I have seen," he went on in the most sarcastic tones he could command, "captains as looked like squareheads."

"Who are you making reference to?" demanded Captain Porter, who was touchy about his Teutonic appearance. He half rose, seriously discommoding a Chinese "boy" who was bringing on the fish.

Mr. Bidgood conveyed a last spoonful of soup to his

mouth with a trembling hand, and pushed back his plate in disdainful silence.

"I only wish that I resembled Don Carlos," said Tingle, taking up the thread of conversation again. "One of the bravest gentlemen that ever wrote his name on the scroll of fame, in my opinion. And I ought to be a judge of brave men. Señor Canaba will tell you the same."

"His Highness? One of the most valorous," returned the señor emphatically. "May the saints prosper the royal cause."

He raised his glass. The colonel rapidly did the same. It was apparent to the company that they drank to a secret toast.

"His portrait used to hang in the hall of my humble *hacienda* at the foot of the Andes," continued the colonel, helping himself liberally to fish. "But it was burnt during a rebellion and I have never been able to replace it. If I came across another I should purchase it at once."

He attacked the fish and again there was silence.

"Helen," said Mary suddenly from her corner next to Mr. Bidgood.

"Yes?" enquired Helen from her corner at Captain Porter's right hand.

"I have a plan. Hurrah!" She waved her hand excitedly.

"What is it?" asked Helen with an indulgent smile.

"If I tell you, will you help?" demanded Mary, leaning towards her.

"Yes, of course. That is——"

"And you, Mr. Tingle?"

"I'd conquer the world for you, my dear señorita," stated the colonel, glancing up for a moment from his fish.

It struck Thomas Todd, looking round the party, that the faces of both the mate and Señor Canaba expressed a similar sentiment.

" Mr. Bidgood, you're a dear ! I know you'll help ! " continued Mary, laying an affectionate hand on the white mess jacket.

Really ! In front of the owner, and the captain, and the mate ! This sort of thing would not do at all. Why, the whole ship would get to know about it.

" Say yes, dear Mr. Bidgood," cooed Mary in his ear. He felt his arm pinched. What a minx !

" Yes," he rumbled in a burst of perspiration that ruined the starch on his shirt front for ever. " What is it all about ? "

" Now mind, you've promised," said Mary, holding up a slender finger. " You know we want three pounds more for our new cot at the Children's Hospital, Helen," she went on breathlessly, " and this is my plan for getting it. Mr. Bidgood will dress up as Don Carlos ; Helen, you will paint his picture ; and Mr. Tingle shall buy it for three pounds. Now isn't it splendid ? "

Everyone seeming to think it was, Mr. Bidgood had to pretend he thought so also.

" Helen has her paints all ready, and Mr. Tingle, I'm certain, has a uniform," Mary informed him, bobbing up and down in her chair in excitement, " and to-morrow morning I'll come and help you to put it on."

" Happy man ! " murmured Señor Canaba.

" It'll fit you A 1," put in Tingle, who seemed greatly taken with the idea, " and there's a hat to match."

" But what about my engines ? " enquired Mr. Bidgood, turning to the owner.

Thomas Todd expressed the opinion that they would continue to revolve even though Mr. Bidgood should relax his watch over them for an hour or so.

" You naughty, wicked humbug," cried Mary, shaking her head at him. " Trying to escape doing your duty to our hospital by making us believe that you cannot leave

your work. Why, everyone knows chief engineers never do any work except by accident. Mr. Evans told us so himself, didn't he, Helen?"

In the general laugh that followed Mr. Bidgood did not join. It is true that the outside of him wore what might have been meant for a smile. Inside, nevertheless, everything was whirling. He no longer thought. He merely sat there the subject of a fixed impression. And that impression was that he would be fortunate if he escaped from the saloon with a shred of character left to him. A wine-bibber! A toyer with women! Of foreign appearance, and never working except by accident! . . . "Why don't they call me an organ grinder at once and have done with it?" he muttered from time to time, working his knife and fork mechanically. And again with reference to the politeness of Señor Canaba on his left—"If that bowing and scraping son of a gun doesn't leave off pestering me with his salt and pepper, which he knows as well as I do that I can reach out and get when I want to, I'll bash his head in, drat him."

In the saloon the air seemed to grow hotter, the lights dimmer. On his right the colonel's high-pitched voice sounded incessantly. Other voices mingled with it, flutes in a brass band. Crockery clattered, corks popped. The regular appearance of the neck of a bottle above the colonel's glass was becoming monotonous. At the other end of the table the captain sat like a graven image, while the owner talked quietly with the fair-haired girl in blue. Next to him this little fribble was rolling her eyes at the dago.

Dixon had scarcely spoken a word all dinner-time. He looked, poor fellow, as though he wanted a change of scene, so after a while Mr. Bidgood rose to give him one. They retired together.

"A lively bit of stuff, the dark one," remarked Mr. Bidgood affably, as they walked along the deck.

"D'ye mean Miss Amerton?" growled the mate.

"Aye, I believe that's what she's called. Did ye notice how she tried to carry on with me, and when she saw I wasn't taking any, how she cottoned on to that Spanish joker? You mark my words," continued Mr. Bidgood impressively, "that one's out for a lark and we all see some fun afore we've finished."

"Good-night," said the mate shortly, turning on his heel.

"Good-night to you," responded Mr. Bidgood. "Seems a bit off his eggs, does Dixon," he rumbled to himself as he waddled into the alley-way. "Well, we all have our troubles."

He passed his hand mechanically down his side in search of a pipe, and the fact of no pocket meeting his fingers made him conscious again of the mess jacket. Acutely conscious, too, of the reason his pipe was absent.

What was that? A smell of burning? He stood for a moment sniffing the air, and then hastened to the galley. No, all was well there; the fire dead, the lamp extinguished.

He closed the iron door and proceeded on his way. At his right hand, hot to the touch and dusty, was the iron casing of the engine-room. He felt it carefully all over, and decided that it was no hotter than usual. A row of cabins lined the alley-way on the seaward side. Most of them were dark, and though each, as he ascertained, smelt different, none smelt of burning. At the end of the alley-way was the habitation of the second mate. This, through an aperture in its drawn curtain, shewed a light. Here, also, the odour of fire was certainly stronger.

"Skinner's lamp's smoking," muttered Mr. Bidgood. "He must have dropped off asleep with it turned on."

He lifted the curtain, caught a glimpse of something sparkling on the bunk, heard the bang of a box lid, and then,

encountering the furious gaze of the second mate, drew back a pace.

"What do you want?" demanded the old man tensely, his face livid.

"Your lamp's smoking," explained Mr. Bidgood.

"What the hell's that to do with you if it is?"

Mr. Bidgood dropped the curtain and proceeded on his way. He felt literally shocked. "Everyone seems off their eggs to-night," he muttered again. "The 'old man' is, I am, Dixon is, and now old Skinner. He must have been totting up his dollars. That's what put his back up."

Speculating incuriously on what the bright object on the bunk might have been, he passed through an iron doorway to the engine-room.

CHAPTER XI

INSIDE that door there was another world, a world of heat and dust, white-walled and iron-barred, where he was acknowledged king. As he stood on the grating and looked downwards, a thousand sounds, regular, familiar, and cheering, greeted his ears. The click of a valve, the sigh of a gland, the whisper of the steam sweeping through felted pipes all told a tale. They told him all was well.

Beneath, the cylinder tops were visible, three black and corrugated discs with silver rims. Above, the open skylight revealed a spangled sky.

Mr. Bidgood, drawing contented breath, slowly descended the ladder, his hands gripping the rails. The polished iron burnt his palms, and he felt uncomfortably hot, yet it was in this kingdom of his, and here alone, that now, as always, he found his best happiness. Here at any rate he was his own man, free from the obscure incidents and puzzling intrigues of the outer world, that world where life was very like whist, in that no matter what cards he held, other people in some mysterious manner won all the tricks.

Here there was nothing incomprehensible, nothing abstract. Everything could be grasped, could be filed, chipped, polished, hammered, forged, cast, ground, and in one way or another kept in subjection.

Should a piston rod get too warm, at his hand was the swabbing brush; should a bearing sulk, or the thrust

block exhibit tokens of obstinacy, a simple treatment with grease and water soon brought them to their senses. And so it was with the remainder of his subjects ; engines, boilers, pumps, donkeys, winches, and windlasses. He held a remedy for their every disease, a safeguard against their every danger.

There was nothing about these iron people that he did not understand. It seemed as if they knew this, and suffered his rule almost with content, doing their duty unceasingly, in silence for the most part, or as silent as they perhaps knew how to be. But always, when neglected, they cried out for oil.

He visited them every day and sometimes twice a day, touched them, and listened carefully to the sound they made. If a pump worked with a squeak or moved as though in pain, without any hesitation Mr. Bidgood had its little inside taken out, thoroughly cleaned and dosed with oil, and once more all would be well. But woe betide any machine that shewed signs of rebellion or proved unwilling ! On it Mr. Bidgood had no mercy. Under his direction blow lamps and hammers assaulted its sides, spanners screwed at its ends, paraffin was pumped into it, and iron crowbars scraped its limbs. It had either to move or break, and generally it moved.

Such cases of insubordination, common enough when Mr. Bidgood joined the ship, were nowadays few and far between ; yet there was one thing in his kingdom he could not entirely control. This was the steam.

It was indeed almost uncontrollable. An imprisoned spirit, ceaselessly striving to escape, ever watchful, never resting, rushing with a whine through the steel pipes, through the iron cylinders, pressing on through other larger pipes, and then, with altered aspect, through condensers and pumps, back again to the boilers, and so on its endless round.

It was to the energy exerted by this spirit that Mr. Bidgood looked for the working of his machinery. There was a circular gauge something like an aneroid barometer in the engine-room. An examination of this gauge on arriving at the foot of the ladder that evening told him that things were not as well as they might be.

He went at once to the stokehold, and stood under a ventilator, watching his pigtailed stokers manipulate the fires. The night breeze blew down upon him with the force of a fan, drying his thick, short hair and stirring his beard. Half a dozen ashpits lent their feeble light, and shewed a floor of chequered iron plates covered with dust, a heap of clinker, and on either side a bunker door half shut upon a stream of coal.

In one corner a smoky lamp exhibited another steam gauge, and Mr. Bidgood's new-born instinct urged him to have this lamp extinguished. But reason counselled otherwise. He contented himself with pointing out the offending article to one of the stokers, and turned his back on it with a sigh. Clearly there was little to be gained by precaution against a smoky lamp in a place like this.

It was otherwise with the ashes. These at least, when raked out from underneath the fires, could be quenched properly before being hauled on deck. During the last few hours he had particularly observed the methods in the stokehold as regards this important matter, and the carelessness of them had surprised him deeply. He had spoken to the stokers and also to Evans. The attitude of the latter especially had been astonishing. This gentleman, although a second engineer, seemed incapable of understanding that hot ashes thrown overboard were caught by the breeze and blown about the ship and that every single ash contained the germ of a fire.

Their argument on the subject that morning had taken

on almost the appearance of an altercation. The final word had lain with Mr. Bidgood.

"Well," he had said, "I've told ye, and if the ship catches alight and we all go to the bottom, don't go saying I didn't. That's all."

Remarks such as these, falling from the lips of his chief, ought to have made a deep impression on the second engineer. Yet from the condition of things in the stokehold that evening it was irritatingly apparent that they had not.

"Rake your fires," shouted Mr. Bidgood, suddenly aware of the fact that he was in a bad temper.

Assuming his fiercest expression he watched a stoker go along the row of furnaces, tilting back each rusty door and stirring up the fires within.

It seemed cruel work.

Out of each door there leaped a wild tongue of flame, and this the crouching Chinaman advanced and fought, plunging his heavy rake into the bowels of it, working with fierce, and, so it seemed, almost scared energy. And as he fought, the flame appeared to grow in strength.

A white-hot flickering light filled the sooty stokehold, throwing every muscle of his naked body into high relief, exhibiting with unearthly distinctness his tense, seared face, the plated walls behind him, the closed bulkhead door, the dusty corners, the tubes and brushes in the racks, the shovels, pails, and slices on the floor. And then the door closed again and all was dark.

Eight times the sweating Chinaman fought the flame, but still the face of Mr. Bidgood never lost its fierce expression.

"Draw the ashpits," he commanded directly the man had finished. "Now then, look slippery; where's your water?"

Below each boiler there were soon little heaps of

incandescent ash, and on these, under the close supervision of Mr. Bidgood, the fireman flung bucketful after bucketful of water.

The atmosphere of the stokehold, when Mr. Bidgood had done, was unbreathable to a chief engineer, so he departed.

"That's the way you want to damp your ashes," he told the fireman. "But you never will, you never will," he added for his own benefit as he groped along the narrow way to the engine-room. "Once you get an idea into your silly heads there's no driving of it out."

He walked back to the gauge, and, tapping the base of it with a fat forefinger, was pleased to find that steam was rising. His mighty exertions in the stokehold had not been altogether in vain.

Already the engines walked round with a livelier step as if cheered by his return. They moved with maiden daintiness, their slender limbs flashing in the soft lamplight ; and when he passed along their front with outstretched hand, they lifted coy feet and gently kicked him. He seemed to like this, for he allowed them to do it any number of times, looking far happier in their attentions than he had earlier in the evening when Mary Amerton pinched his arm. Later he was good enough to whistle a tune for them, keeping step to it as he marched up and down the platform, with head erect and shoulders squared, monarch of all he surveyed.

He was still on the same tune when towards eleven o'clock the second engineer came down the ladder. Evans was in gay attire, but the look on his face was not at all a happy one.

"Why, not in bed yet? What's wrong?" demanded Mr. Bidgood.

"I've been on the poop," explained Evans shortly.

"Aye, and who did you see?" asked Mr. Bidgood. He stopped walking, and stood under the ventilator.

"Nobody much," replied Evans in a bitter tone. "I went along there to talk to the two girls, but that fat, red-moustached johnny buttonholed me as soon as ever I put my foot on the poop, and gabbled away to me all evening about some chap or other called Pedro."

"He's got a tongue on him, has the colonel," murmured Mr. Bidgood sympathetically. "And did he not let you away?" he asked.

"Not much," said the second. "It wouldn't have been any use if he had. Miss Amerton and the foreign-looking fellow had all one side of the deck to themselves. As for Miss Clatworthy, I did think I was all right there; but it's plainly a case of 'off with the old friend and on with the new.' This man, Todd, is her new mark, apparently."

"Ha!" said Mr. Bidgood, stepping over and tapping a gauge, as if to shew him that, although he might now and then unbend and talk of other matters to underlings, the business of the ship nevertheless mainly occupied his mind.

"I'll put him where he belongs," went on Evans. "I'll soon teach him to shove his nose into my affairs. He got a bit of a shock this evening to begin with, the upstart."

"What's that?" enquired Mr. Bidgood, turning from his gauge in some alarm.

"You didn't like it, did you, you blighter," continued Evans, half to himself, "when I tapped you on the back and asked if it wasn't time somebody else had a turn?"

"You tapped his back!" cried the horrified Bidgood.

"Do you know who he is?"

"No, and I don't care," stated Evans. "I'll tap his nose before I've done."

"Well, it's domino for you, my chap," said Mr. Bidgood impressively. "Mr. Todd is the owner." He gazed at his subordinate's countenance, expecting to see therein a reflection of his own alarm.

But the second, though plainly surprised, did not for an instant give up his savage attitude. He stood very still for several seconds, looking at the floor.

"So that's your game, miss, is it?" he muttered at length, and, turning sharply, without another upward glance left the engine-room.

It appeared to Mr. Bidgood, standing there on the platform, that this second of his had very often an unpleasant way with him, a nasty, narking manner of dealing with things that made other people feel uncomfortable. The expression on his face when he turned away was bad enough for anything. It seemed to have changed the very atmosphere, or else it was that a colder wind now blew down the ventilator.

Mr. Bidgood began to walk up and down again. "What does he want to get so piply about?" he muttered to himself. "It's work he ought to be after, not women. Them ashes were a fair disgrace."

He strengthened his resolve to keep Evans busy during the voyage out, and for the next half-hour his brain was occupied in taking notes of various little jobs about the machinery that pressed for execution.

It was clear to him that this unfortunate incident on the poop would make it necessary to keep his subordinate out of the owner's way as much as possible. What Mr. Todd's opinion now was of the discipline of the engine-room staff might be easily guessed. After having been practically assaulted by one of them it could not conceivably be favourable. Well, they would all have to stick together—he and Evans and the whole lot of them—and let Mr. Todd see during the next few days that though some of them were irritable and lacking in due respect at times, their work as engineers was excellent.

With his mind full of thoughts such as these, Mr. Bidgood in his besmattered mess jacket continued his march

up and down the platform. He was now walking with a slower step and looking a shade tired.

But the engines and their satellites began to move at a quicker rate, tireless and graceful, gleaming of gold and silver, singing their ever merry song. Insensibly his pace quickened to theirs ; he simply could not help it. And his thoughts took on a brighter hue.

The lamps burned cheerfully, the needles of the polished gauges hung on the white-painted walls fluttered with encouraging regularity about their appointed marks ; pumps clunked in the background, checks clicked on the boilers, and every little lever seemed to glint a smile.

When the brass clock on the bulkhead shewed a quarter to midnight a blue-clad Chinese greaser appeared on the platform bearing a naked lamp. The time had come to make a last round of the watch. Again Mr. Bidgood allowed the engines to kick his outstretched fingers. But on this occasion, lamp in hand, he led the way round their skirts and bade good-night to the throbbing pumps, here touching a rod, here turning a pet cock, there giving oil to a bush. He looked into the dim recess under the tanks, and stopped to peer down at the bilges. Above and around him writhed a forest of pipes, through which he stepped laboriously, the lamp in his hand casting grotesque shadows on the many-cornered walls. It was a grateful sight to see him at the donkey, wiping its lubricator as a mother wipes her infant's dribbling mouth ; to see him later in the tunnel alongside the smoothly revolving shaft, feeling the bearings, pressing down the grease in the boxes, examining the gland at the end.

When he came back it was almost time to go off watch. He extinguished his lamp and, entering the dark store-room, groped with one arm about the farther end of the waste locker.

The two small barrels still lay there, half covered by the

soft warm waste. So far, so good. But whether the locker was a permanently safe place for them was another matter. He had heard of waste undergoing a sort of spontaneous combustion. He had also, he recollected, seen Evans himself drop a naked paraffin lamp in this selfsame store-room. And if Evans did that sort of thing before his face what would he do behind his back? Again, should an explosion occur in the lazarette, and the ship be lost, no blame could be attached to the chief engineer at the Board of Trade enquiry. An accident near the boilers would put him in a very different case, and, in addition, people might enquire what the gunpowder was doing there. A pretty job he would have to explain the matter, supposing, for the sake of argument, that he were present.

Plainly, these barrels must be moved to the lazarette without delay; and as no man had witnessed their being brought into the engine-room, so no man must be allowed to witness their removal.

Having argued the matter thus far, Mr. Bidgood cast about in his mind for some secretive, careful, trustworthy person who might be charged with the duty of carrying the said barrels up the ladder and across to the lazarette. He could pitch on nobody but himself.

A little later he was on deck, perspiring, puffing, and disarrayed, sitting amid the shadows against the after hatch, with a barrel at the side of him and half his journey done.

The lights about this part of the vessel were now extinguished. The moon was not yet risen. Providence had turned down all the stars. So still was the sombre night that the rush of water against the sides and the quick munk-munk of the propeller sounded almost loud. There appeared no sign of human presence anywhere, but Mr. Bidgood knew that someone was near. The sound of coughing up in the darkness of the poop had driven him to

his present resting-place, and he now sat on the iron plates in a state of some discomposure, waiting for the coast to clear.

Why he had stepped in there instead of creeping back to the engine-room he did not know. Yet it seemed to him on consideration that he had done the most sensible thing. A retreat might have meant discovery, but, as it was, a little patience would no doubt bring his enterprise to a successful issue.

Minutes, he knew, were as years to a man in his position, but, making all allowance for that, the person on the poop seemed in no hurry to move. A cough now and then, and the slight sound of a scraping foot, evidenced his wakefulness. To all appearances he might remain there all night. A heavy dew was falling, and the deck, as well as the tarpaulin on the hatch, was already wet. The night air, to a man fresh from the engine-room, grew to feel damp and chilly.

On a sudden from the direction of the bridge came the clear sound of a bell struck once. It was half-past twelve.

About five seconds later the noise of approaching footsteps caused Mr. Bidgood to crouch further into the shadows. To his intense astonishment and alarm a small figure emerged from the darkness and took up a position on the hatch not five feet from the barrel of gunpowder. This was altogether unexpected. The slightest sound, and discovery was certain. Never before in his life had Mr. Bidgood been so motionless. He scarcely dared breathe. He even framed mentally a curse against his heart for beating so loudly. His eyes were glued on the indistinct figure, and they saw it raise a hand and beat the tarpaulin thrice. This seemed a signal for a renewed scraping of feet aft ; and immediately two figures appeared against the sky at the top of the poop ladder.

Mr. Bidgood, all on edge, thought he recognised the

colonel and Señor Canaba. He watched them descend; he heard them approach through the black shadows. So close came they that one of them actually stumbled against the barrel.

"Curse it! Is that you, Bunn?" muttered the colonel.

"No," whispered the small figure on the hatch. "This is me."

"Ha! good!" said the colonel in a low voice. "Come closer. What have you to report?"

Mr. Bidgood took advantage of the noise made by the half-caste in approaching over the hatch, to slide himself somewhat after the manner of a snail as far back into the shadows as possible. The hot steam pipe of the winch, catching him in the nape of the neck, suddenly stopped his progress. His involuntary movement caused a noise.

"Hush! What was that?" exclaimed Tingle in a sharp whisper. Mr. Bidgood held his breath.

"Nothing," said Canaba, after a pause. "The wind, perhaps. . . . Your report, Bunn."

"I have none with me," murmured the half-caste.

"Good Heavens, man!" said the colonel in an angry undertone. "Didn't I tell you to go to the bows and ascertain the feelings of the crew? How have you been employing your time since dinner?"

"Talking to the head man of the stokers," muttered Bunn, in a sulky voice.

"Come, come, now; that's better," whispered the colonel encouragingly. "And what had he to say? What was his feeling regarding the chief engineer, for instance?"

"He say he's very good man."

"Ah!" murmured Tingle.

Mr. Bidgood, listening intently to every word, noted the tone of disappointment.

"Always asleep," continued Bunn. "And when he is

awake his head is like a cocoanut gnawed by squirrels. Nothing in it. In consequence of this all the firemen have a jolly fine time and do no work."

"Then I take it that they would not be inclined to mutiny?" enquired the colonel, in a regretful whisper.

"No, mister. Not much mutiny about this crew; all of them got a month's pay owing them."

"Good heavens! I never thought of that!" exclaimed the colonel blankly. "This is going to be a most expensive business, buying over the crew. What are we to do?"

Mr. Bidgood, in a state of terrific excitement, leant over to make certain of catching the reply.

"Don't be troubled about this matter," he heard the señor hiss. "They will follow me. As for that fat fool of an engineer, a little later I shall cut his throat myself, as I would do a pig's."

In his start of horror Mr. Bidgood kicked the winch.

"What was that?" exclaimed the colonel in an intense whisper. "Didn't you hear it?" he continued.

"I am certain there is somebody in that black corner over there."

"I will soon find out," cried the señor. Mr. Bidgood, in an agony, heard the scratch of a match. "Curse it, the wind has blown it out," remarked the señor.

"Bend down out of the breeze, behind the barrel I am sitting on," Colonel Tingle advised in an undertone.

Another match scratched. There was a momentary gleam of light.

"Holy Virgin!" exclaimed Señor Canaba, rising hastily. "Colonel, do you know you are sitting on a barrel of gunpowder?"

Colonel Tingle's shout of surprise as he rose and leaped across the deck was loud enough to disturb the whole ship. The señor was rapidly striking matches which the breeze at once blew out; Bunn was retreating over the

hatch. The next instant a rough voice hailed them from the bridge. Discovery was imminent. The desperate Mr. Bidgood, in a last mad effort to avoid it, put out a hand and started the winch in motion.

Above the violent clatter of the wheels and the hissing of the drains he heard the conspirators scuttering away. He saw for an instant the white backs of them as they rushed into the dimly lighted alley-way. And then a cloud of steam surrounded him ; and in the cloud, like Elijah, he hurried aft to his cabin.

CHAPTER XII

AT the loud outcry of Colonel Tingle Helen Clatworthy stirred in her sleep, moving one bare arm uneasily and turning on her side. The clatter of the winch awoke her completely. She sat up in the bunk and turned the lamp full on.

Mary Amerton, in her nightdress, was already at a porthole. "What has happened?" she demanded, exhibiting a scared face.

"Nothing of any importance, we may be sure," returned Helen decidedly. "I can hear the engines still running. They would stop them if there were any danger."

"Would they? They might forget, perhaps," said Mary in a strained voice. "Did you hear that awful cry? It woke me. I'm certain there's a man fallen overboard."

"Nonsense," said Helen, crossing over and looking through the porthole herself.

"Two people already have rushed past; and they shouted from the bridge. I heard them."

"I can't see anything the matter from here," announced Helen. "We are going along just as usual, and now that clattering noise has stopped." She left her post of observation and went back to the bunk. "The best thing you can do," said she, "is to lie down and go to sleep again. Everything is just as it should be; and as for the noises, we shall hear what they were in the morning."

"But there was a cry," said Mary. "I couldn't sleep. Not in all this uncertainty. Oh, Helen, I'm sure something has happened. The ship might be sinking. They might forget we were here."

"Nonsense," said Helen. "Don't be stupid."

"But the cry?" said Mary.

"Oh, I don't know. Perhaps somebody intoxicated. You know what men are late at night."

"It might have been Mr. Evans singing," suggested Mary, plucking up a little courage.

"Why Mr. Evans? You're always mentioning Mr. Evans."

"I thought——" said Mary, hesitating.

"You've no right to think," broke in Helen sharply. "I've never given anyone any right to think. You know I haven't."

"But he might have been singing because you hadn't given him any right to think," pointed out Mary rapidly.

"Well, he wasn't. The voice wasn't anything like his."

"No, quite true," said Mary humbly. "You're very right, dear, it wasn't; and I'm sorry I thought it was, so don't get angry with me, old girl."

"I'm not angry," Helen said in a cool voice. She turned her face to the wall.

"It's so dark," Mary went on. "And everyone makes mistakes in the dark. There are ghosts and fairies and goblins about, and what one might think was singing might be a man in a fit. I'm sure we ought to go and see."

"I'm going to sleep," said Helen.

"The unfortunate sailor died of shock owing to the somnolence of two hospital nurses.' That's how it will read in the papers. They will call me Mrs. Gamp."

No reply from the bunk.

"Dear me!" said Mary. She looked out of the porthole again, and presently: "'The last words he said when expiring in the arms of Mr. Todd, the well-known ship owner, who was present, were: 'Miss Clatworthy ought to be ashamed of herself.''"

"Mr. Todd's asleep," said Helen, turning round.

"Perhaps he is; I hope he is if, as you say, there's nothing the matter. It was funny how like him one of the people that ran by was—but of course . . . in the dark . . . No doubt I was mistaken; but—a man of his age sleeps lightly."

"He's not very old," said Helen, sitting up. "I wonder if we ought to go."

"Here's your dressing-gown," flashed Mary.

"But somebody might see us."

"We'll stand behind the boats," said Mary.

But they left the boats on their right and took up a position against the rail at the after end of the deck. Down on the main deck between them and the poop four men, armed with lanterns, were standing in a group alongside a winch. There was no sign of excitement among them, no hint, in fact, of disaster anywhere.

"Perhaps it's only fire-drill," remarked Mary in slightly disappointed tones.

"Something of that sort, very likely," said Helen.

"Of course it may be the machinery. Yes, that's it. Stop, they'll see us. There's Mr. Bidgood with a lamp, bending down and looking at the winch."

"Why, he's in pyjamas!"

"Naturally, at this time of night."

Even at that distance it could be plainly seen from Mr. Bidgood's gesticulations that, whatever the subject under discussion was, he could make nothing of it.

He handed the lamp back to Captain Porter and the four stood in further conversation. At last one of them

stooped, lifted something on to his shoulder, and walked aft with it.

"That's Mr. Dixon," remarked Mary in some excitement. "I wonder what he's carrying."

"It seems to me to be a barrel," said Helen.

"Oh!" cried Mary, taking her arm, "a barrel! How awful! A bottle is bad enough. Mr. Todd, I'm ashamed of you; an old man like you. Look at the way they're all following it, Helen. Like donkeys after a carrot."

"Don't be stupid," said Helen reassuringly. "It's not what you think. Beer-barrels aren't painted red. Besides, there's not the slightest fear of anything of that sort with Mr. Todd on board. We may feel absolutely safe with him."

"Why may we?"

"Because . . . well, because we may," said Helen, somewhat lamely. "There, you see I was right," she continued hastily. "They're all coming this way again."

They ran back to the cabin, where Helen turned down the lamp.

"I don't want them to think they've disturbed us," she explained in low tones.

"I should like to know what they had in that barrel," said Mary.

"Hush!" interrupted Helen suddenly.

Footsteps sounded outside, then stopped. The two girls sat very still.

"Good-night, again, captain," they heard Thomas Todd say. "I suppose you'll enquire further into this extraordinary affair in the morning."

"Certainly I shall." The captain seemed, so far as could be gathered from his voice, very much annoyed. "I never had such a thing happen to me before. It looks to me like gross carelessness on the part of the engineers."

"But what about the barrel? That is the extra-

ordinary feature. They've nothing to do with putting it there."

"That's right, Mr. Todd," murmured Mary. "Fair play to everybody."

"I don't know what to make of it," said Captain Porter gruffly.

"You don't think anything of the mate's theory, then, that somebody carrying off a barrel from the lazarette brushed against the steam valve and started the winch? Bidgood, I thought, seemed rather impressed by it."

"Well, sir," said the captain in a tone of finality, "we will look into the matter in the morning. I'm pretty sure we shall find it due to neglect on the part of Bidgood. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," said Todd briefly, and it seemed a little frigidly. The footsteps died away.

"We shall hear about everything in the morning," said Helen, as she drew off her white dressing-gown and lay down. "Are you ready?"

At a nod from Mary she turned the lamp out.

"I wonder what was in that barrel?" Mary said.

"You can ask in the morning. Good-night."

"I will. Good-night."

But in the morning everyone avoided talking about the incident, and consequently Mary forgot to ask. Her head, like the colonel's, seemed to be full of the picture Helen was to paint. They both of them talked about it during the whole of breakfast; indeed, until the time came when Mr. Bidgood stood posed in a heroic attitude on the deck neither of them talked of anything else.

It had been a wearing time for the chief engineer. To the end of life the memory of that past night would remain with him: the quick, uneven clatter of the winch, the steam, the scurrying figures, the quick, creeping run he had made

alongside the coaming of the hatch, the tiptoed crawl to the cabin.

How he had ever managed to slip out of that dress suit, into pyjamas, on to the bunk, and off to slumber before they came hammering at the door, was more than he was able to explain, even to himself.

He remembered little incidents of the struggle: torn buttonholes, broken bootlaces, a glimpse in the glass of a desperate face disappearing into the neck of a white shirt; how he overbalanced himself while standing on one foot, trying to pull off his trousers with the other; the putting of his arm into the wrong sleeve of his pyjama jacket, and the fact that he made no remark about it, in such an upset condition was he; his snores; and then the voice of Dixon and the final return to the deck.

They had asked for an explanation of the matter, and he, to his infinite regret, had been unable to give them the true one, but had advanced in its place a feeble hypothesis framed on the supernatural. He had seen that they doubted him; Captain Porter's little blue eyes had blazed suspicion, his voice had blared it. Had not the mate's suggestion about thieves, and Mr. Todd's seeming support of it, offered a loophole, perhaps the three of them might have been at that moment in possession of his confession. And he—instead of being surrounded by an admiring group, and in the act of having his portrait painted—where in that event would he have been? Sitting in some dark corner, fallen from his high estate, an outcast, shunned perhaps even by the cook.

During the night, as he lay tossing on his pillow, he had thought of many other explanations he might have offered for the presence on deck of the barrel. But none of them had borne investigation. Yet something plausible would have to be arrived at, or how was he to report the sinister

conversation he had overheard. And he must report it, or they would all wake up some fine morning to find their throats cut.

Could he say that he was walking in his sleep, and that he must have picked up the barrel, mistaking it for beer ? He pictured to himself the contemptuous look with which the captain would reject the possibility of such an error. No, that would not answer. Could he——

"Do try and put on a pleasanter expression, Mr. Bidgood," said Helen, from her seat at the canvas.

Mr. Bidgood did his best for her, to the horror of the spectators.

"No, no !" cried Helen ; "that won't do at all. Turn your head a little to the left. Part the lips in a slight smile, and fix your eyes on Captain Porter, looking at him, if possible, rather condescendingly. I want to get the proper kingly effect," she explained to the company. "You know what I mean."

They all nodded. Colonel Tingle stepped forward, and having explained to Mr. Bidgood that he was holding a sceptre, not an umbrella, showed him exactly how Dom Pedro used to hold his.

"This man is not the least like Don Carlos," he muttered to Señor Canaba, retiring.

"No resemblance whatever in the daylight," agreed the señor.

"However, we shall get a picture of the blue uniform, the plumed hat, and the beard ; that's better than nothing," continued Tingle. "I don't suppose the Filipinos will know the difference."

"Really, the pose is excellent now," remarked Thomas Todd approvingly. "Ah ! that's it ! Head up and shoulders back. Fine !"

Mr. Bidgood at once burst several buttons in an endeavour to carry out the owner's suggestion.

"The uniform is a bit tight," remarked Tingle, as he carefully picked them up. "I wore it last at a *levée* of the emperor's at Rio. The slight gash observable in the collar shows where that dastardly villain Golez attempted to cut my throat as we were going home in the cab together afterwards."

"Oh, Mr. Bidgood, Mr. Bidgood, you've moved!" cried Helen, waving her pencil.

"And he's not looking a bit pleasant. I don't believe he likes it at all," remarked Mary. "No, Mr. Bidgood, oh, no; you mustn't look at Colonel Tingle. You must look at Captain Porter." She ran across the deck, her high heels clicking, and her white skirt revealing, perhaps a shade too freely, a pair of pretty ankles. "Tell me when to stop, Helen," she cried, as she put her fingertips on Mr. Bidgood's head and twisted it slowly.

"That will do," said Helen impatiently.

"Yes, it was a very curious affair, that attempt at my assassination by Golez," went on the colonel loudly. "I can't say I was surprised at it. A servant of the public in a country like Brazil treats an event like that as an everyday occurrence. And I was a marked man at the time because of the very special attentions that were being paid me by the emperor and empress. No, the fact of any attempt being made certainly did not surprise me. What did, however, was the ingratitude of that rogue Golez, a man whom I had rescued from one of the lowest public-houses in the city and placed in an honourable position among my suite. But he never had the chance again; as it is needless to tell you, my dear Canaba, he never had the chance again."

"What was his throat like?" enquired the señor with an air of deep interest.

"His throat?" asked the colonel, obviously surprised.

"You tell us he never had another chance," pointed

out the señor. "We know what that means in Brazil."

"Ah . . . yes . . . I understand. How dense of me!" said the colonel. He looked around at the necks of the company. "As a matter of fact, Canaba," he continued, in a low but perfectly distinct voice, "it was exactly like the chief engineer's here."

The sceptre slipped from Mr. Bidgood's nerveless hand and clattered on the deck.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Captain Porter, picking it up. "What's wrong with you this morning?" He replaced the sceptre and ostentatiously clasped each finger round it. "Creeping paralysis, that's what I'm afraid of," Mr. Bidgood heard him whisper to the owner.

"Oh, do try to look a little pleasant," wailed Helen from the easel. "I know how awfully tired you must be, but remember it's for the sake of charity."

"Every smile may mean a week in the hospital for some poor infant," urged Mary. "Think of that."

"Dear me—really? Dear me," muttered Thomas Todd as he watched Mr. Bidgood's gallant effort. "The poor fellow must be ill. Perhaps he's worrying about the winch last night. I hope he isn't. So very unnecessary."

A moment later he crossed over to the easel. "That's splendid," he said to Helen. "But, please, you mustn't overdo yourself. I think you've made a fine beginning. Er—such a lot for one day."

"I should like to go on for ever," returned Helen, looking into his glasses, a flush of enthusiasm on her rather pale face. "Painting is one of the few things I never tire of. And the subject is so interesting. I've never tried a portrait before. But of course," she added, manipulating the brush, "I shall have to give up directly the model gets tired."

"I don't think Mr. Bidgood seems particularly fresh this morning, do you?" said Thomas Todd anxiously.

"Oh," said Helen, looking up, "then perhaps we'd better stop." She added another stroke or so to the canvas and began to collect her implements.

"You're not going to leave off already?" cried Mary, interrupting her conversation with Señor Canaba.

"Yes, Mr. Bidgood's tired," said Helen.

"I'm not," said the chief engineer eagerly, addressing the owner.

"No, but I'm afraid we—er—all are," said Thomas Todd; "Miss Clatworthy is. And then, remember, tomorrow morning we begin again."

"Oh, but you're not tired, Helen!" protested Mary. She ran across to the canvas and looked at it. "Why, you've hardly done anything, you lazy thing. Don't let them stop, Mr. Todd; it's too bad."

"I think it's a very good beginning," said Thomas Todd stoutly.

"Mr. Bidgood can't be tired," Mary pointed out. "He has only just got up. I know it, because it was I that woke him. You've no idea what a heavy sleeper you are, Mr. Bidgood. I knocked and I knocked. My knuckles are quite bruised. Aren't they, Señor Canaba?" She held out her small hand to the Spaniard, who at once made a pretence of inspecting the damage.

"And when I did wake you," she continued, smiling round at the company, "oh, Mr. Bidgood, what a time you took! You might have been a lady, Mr. Bidgood, and I might have been a beggar maiden. Yes, he kept me waiting there—with the uniform; and then—why, he only opened the door the merest crack, and I had to push the uniform through—like that." With both hands she quaintly went through the action.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the colonel and Canaba both together.

"It must have been very amusing," remarked Thomas Todd.

"One has to be careful with ladies on board of a steamer," observed Mr. Bidgood drily.

"A veritable St. Anthony," murmured the señor.

"Try some of the other doors, Miss Amerton; you won't find them all so inhospitable, I assure you," cried the colonel.

Helen saw him wink at Captain Porter. "Mary, come and help me with my paints," she called out sharply. "No, I don't want you, or you," she said very bluntly to the colonel and the señor. "We can manage quite well, thank you."

"Are you going already, Helen?" began Mary innocently. But something in the other's face stopped her. She followed meekly to the cabin.

"Seems to think a lot of herself, the yellow-haired one," remarked Colonel Tingle to the owner as they watched them leave the poop.

"A lady of a very different stamp to those you're accustomed to mix with," rejoined Thomas Todd, suddenly very stiff.

"Eh? What's that?"

"I said, 'A lady of a very different stamp to those you're accustomed to mix with,'" repeated Thomas Todd. He looked the colonel full in the face, then turned and went forward also.

"And you're another of them," said the colonel viciously at his back. "But you won't last long. Come on, Canaba. Wait a minute, though. Does any gentleman say 'yes' to a gin and bitters?"

Captain Porter did, and the three left for the saloon.

Mr. Bidgood in his blue uniform remained alone, sitting dejectedly on the edge of the skylight, the black plumed hat cast down beside him, and with his chin in his hand.

A breeze had sprung up, and over the bright surface of the water a multitude of wavelets flashed. Beyond the rocking taffrail the deep blue rim of the ocean showed very faintly crinkled against a faded sky. And the thick, throbbing note of the propeller grew and lessened in unison with the motion of the stern.

It was a day to delight the heart of a sailor, but Mr. Bidgood took no notice of it. What did the weather outside matter when inside all was tempest and fog, with not a light visible? A light! Yes, that was what he wanted, a light to guide him safely round the skirts of the disgrace that threatened him for last night's doings, into a favourable position for revealing his terrible secret.

He sat there a long time—until the voices of the colonel and his companions in the saloon had ceased, until a spider, thinking probably that such a highly coloured object would be bound to attract flies, began to spin a web on him. But no light came.

At length he arose, walked slowly down to the cabin, and changed.

CHAPTER XIII

AT sunset the breeze dropped, and evening beheld the *Susan Dale* gliding along as steady as a dancing dowager, with flashing headlights, a necklace of bright portholes, and with the tip of her funnel glowing red, as if hot with pleasure. Dinner was over in the saloon, and under the guidance of Captain Porter, who had taken the wheel in order to show the steersman how to handle it, she was treading the vast ballroom of the ocean, delightfully uncertain as to whether her partner intended to reverse, or merely wanted to dodge a rock. But in a minute or two the dull and dismal mate relieved him, and once again she had to go on drawing a straight line, while he, the captain, and his big cigar went back to his sofa in the chart-room.

But not for her were sofas in chart-rooms, or long-chairs on hatches, or quiet conversations in corners with interesting ship-owners. She must work and she must worry day in and day out, night out and night in, and, regardless of the dangers of the deep, sea-serpents, submarine volcanoes and so forth, must bring her burden safe to port.

And if she for a moment falter she may comfort herself with the reflection that others are faltering too. That stout gentleman with hair rapidly turning grey, who paces the engine-room platform, for instance; that oldish, thinnish person in the tight-shut cabin at the end of the

alley-way, who kneels over an open sea chest ; that middle-aged, respectable looking lady and gentleman engaged in chewing betel somewhere near the fore-castle.

These, like the rest on board, had their troubles ; difficulties to be evaded, dangers, some as yet unknown, to be encountered and overcome. The half-caste stealing forward ! The low-voiced talk of the sailors ! The Spaniard and Evans whispering together in the mess-room !

There was also Mary.

She stood aft alone, looking out over the sea. It was calm as destiny, warm as velvet, dark as sable, and it reached out and touched the sky. Overhead the stars shone mistily, scattered as wayfarers in a sleeping city. But in the water beyond the feeble band of illumination cast by the cabin lamps there were other stars that glittered and died and glittered again, the bejewelled dwellers in the deep. These, in palely gleaming raiment, were assembled that night, in constellations which far outshone the heavens, in crowds, in languorously dancing multitudes, multitudes that grew ever thicker as the ship moved on. And presently, patch by patch, field after field, the velvet ocean flushed luminous, glow succeeding glow, soft and vivid, like summer lightning on the edge of an unlit sky, but by far more brilliant. No earthly monarch was ever fêted thus. No worldly gathering was ever so illumined.

It was as though an army whose every soldier bore a lantern was marching and counter-marching underneath the sea. It was as though a myriad diadems were sparkling there. Lights glimmered on the horizon. The deeps beside the ship cascaded fire. Her wake shone gold. And then at last the whole sea flamed . . . And all was dark.

"The fairies must have crowned a king," said Mary in a dreamy way, after a while, addressing nobody.

"It's the animalculæ, Miss Amerton," said a voice. "Really, most extraordinary; well worth seeing."

She looked round with a start, and found the owner and Helen standing just behind her.

"I have read about it in my encyclopædia," continued Thomas Todd, letting his eyeglasses drop.

"I distinctly saw a mermaid's tail," said Mary, facing him.

"Impossible; some dead fish, probably," said Thomas Todd.

"But she waved it at me," persisted Mary. "Just as—just as naturally as you might wave your foot."

"I never do—er—wave my foot," said Thomas Todd, looking at her in some amazement.

"You might if your fins were tired with swimming," pointed out Mary.

"I—I—really——" said Thomas Todd. But Mary had turned to the rail again, and appeared intent on the sea.

"Shall we go and look over the stern, Mr. Todd?" suggested Helen. "At the—what is the name of it?"

"Dear me! The wake?" said Thomas Todd, recovering his self-possession. They walked along the deck.

"Mary is sometimes rather funny," Helen informed him confidentially. "She dreams, and makes such stupid remarks. I get quite vexed with her sometimes."

"She's very young," pointed out Thomas Todd in excuse.

"She is," acknowledged Helen. "It was a fine sight; the sea seemed as if oil was blazing on it. I feel privileged to have witnessed such a scene."

"Remarkable," agreed Todd. "And, so my encyclopædia informs me, not often witnessed by landmen." They stopped at the extreme stern and sat down, Helen on a deck chair, and her escort on a bollard, gingerly.

"Sit on my book," said Helen, noticing his hesitation.

"I shall hurt it."

"No matter," said Helen bravely. "It only cost sixpence."

"It always appears so extraordinary to me," began Thomas Todd, "that even in a hot climate like this, directly night occurs all the iron about the ship becomes so extremely cold."

"It must be due—to being so near the equator?"

"Probably," agreed Thomas Todd.

"And the vibration here," went on Helen. "You feel it so much more at the stern."

"Does it incommode you?" he asked, making to get up. "Let me move your chair."

"Not at all," said Helen. "No, don't move, I beg. Please."

Thomas Todd therefore sat on. "Talking of vibration," he said, taking up the conversation again, "do you go to many dances in Ceylon?"

"A few. Race week is our great festivity. We nurses go everywhere, of course."

"Of course," said Todd solemnly. "Are you fond of dancing, Miss Clatworthy?"

"Er——" said Helen, looking at him.

"I am," continued Thomas Todd. "It may surprise you, but there's nothing I like better."

"So am I: I dote on it."

"Such a healthy exercise."

"Wonderfully so."

"A good polka, now, in the parlour, after dinner, with the chairs pushed back. I think it's excellent," said Thomas Todd enthusiastically. "Excellent!"

"We might get up a dance on board," suggested Helen, sitting forward and speaking enthusiastically also. "But then—there are no musicians. What a pity!"

"Tingle plays the flute!" cried Thomas Todd, carried away. "I—that is——" he said, recovering himself; "I mean to say—this is, of course, strictly between ourselves, Miss Clatworthy?"

"I can keep a secret, I hope, Mr. Todd," said Helen with dignity. She leant still further forward.

"Colonel Tingle and I were at school together," Thomas Todd whispered. "I'm firmly convinced of it. We were at a school at Peckham. This is, of course, quite private."

"Quite," said Helen. "I'm sure nobody would have guessed it. Your accent——"

"He learnt the flute there as an extra. His parents paid," continued Thomas Todd solemnly. "I did hear it was because his mother wanted him to have a small mouth."

"Ah!"

"You—er—might ask him," suggested Thomas Todd; "just casually introducing the subject by some such remark as: 'Dear me, now, colonel, you do look rather like a flautist, you do indeed. Am I mistaken?'"

"I will," said Helen. "I think I can manage that."

"But of course don't mention me," Thomas Todd warned her. "You see, he does not recognise me. And—this is strictly between ourselves—to speak exactly, I am rather glad of it."

"I don't care for him much," said Helen. "That is, not very much."

"Nor do I," said Thomas Todd. "And I dislike the Spanish gentleman, Canaba, extremely."

"You can't dislike them worse than I do," Helen assured him. "We—we seem to have similar dislikes," she added diffidently.

"I don't like his eyes," said Thomas Todd, "or his manner towards me."

"I shall warn Mary against him; she's far too much in his company. Don't you think so—as a man of experience?"

"Well—um—really now——" said Thomas Todd hesitatingly.

"Ah, caution, caution," laughed Helen. "I can see plainly what you think, and shall warn Mary. Is it not rather pleasant to have a common dislike for anyone? So knitting together."

"Perhaps it is."

"And now you have given me your confidence," went on Helen, "I will give you mine. You know we were very misinformed when we arranged to make our voyage to Hong Kong in this steamer—though, of course, I am glad now I came. Mr. Evans told us that there would be no passengers, and we find that there are several. And among them these mysterious looking Spaniards, desperate looking fellows. Of course you are on board, and I know I am quite safe, but otherwise I should be very sorry indeed that I came."

"Really—you—you're quite safe," declared Thomas Todd, looking very uncomfortable.

"Yes, I'm sure of that," said Helen, gazing straight at him. "I'm sure of that," she went on in less certain tones.

"Nothing out of the ordinary could happen on a British ship nowadays. We shall be quite safe."

"Absolutely," said Thomas Todd. "Er—why not?"

"Yet you must admit that there have been one or two funny things occur since Ceylon," went on Helen. "Your arrival in the middle of the night; and again, about one this morning, the winch rattling."

"You heard that, then?" asked Todd, surprised. "You never mentioned it."

"I thought you or the captain would," explained Helen. "Yes, the shouting woke us, and we went on deck and

saw Mr. Dixon carrying a barrel away. What was in the barrel?"

"Er—cargo of some kind," said Thomas Todd. "We think some thief or other must have been at the cargo," he went on quickly, "and in running away must have brushed against the winch steam valve and started the winch."

"Did you hear what was in the barrel?" asked Helen.

"I'll enquire," said Thomas Todd, looking down.

"The sea looks much as usual again," remarked Helen, after a long pause. "All the lights in the water have gone. Animalculæ, you said, I think, Mr. Todd?"

"I believe the phosphorescent appearance is caused by them," said Thomas Todd precisely. He felt irritated. "I've read about the subject in my encyclopædia. Perhaps some of the sailors could tell us a little about it."

They referred the matter to Captain Porter when he came on the poop. He said that, although scientists were of a different opinion, it was his firm conviction that the phenomenon they had just witnessed was due to the cast-off scales of fish, which at stated periods ascended to the surface, attracted by the heat.

"Oh," said Helen, "do you think that's possible? Mr. Todd says——"

"Of course it is, miss," broke in Captain Porter decidedly. "Fishes are reptiles, and snakes shed their skins; and so do fish in the same way."

"I see," said Helen in unconvinced tones.

"But then how do you account for the sudden flashing and dying out?" asked the owner.

"Ah, that's just what we can't explain," replied Captain Porter in a learned manner. "It's maybe due to the force of gravitation."

"What is?—if I may interrupt," asked Colonel Tingle, joining them.

It appeared that he had seen something of the sort in these waters before, but at no time anything to compare with the nightly display on the Orinoco. The various lighting effects were, of course, due to electricity.

"Captain Porter thinks it's due to the scales of fish," Thomas Todd informed him.

"Absurd, if you'll excuse my saying so," declared the colonel.

"Why absurd?" asked the captain warmly.

"There's no fishy smell. That disposes of your theory *in toto*," returned Tingle.

"Fishes' scales don't smell," said the captain positively.

"My dear sir," remonstrated Colonel Tingle, "go into any fried-fish shop in Peck—Pernambuco on a Saturday night, and you'll find out that they do, distinctly."

Although unable to follow Colonel Tingle's advice, the captain continued to argue the matter, appealing to Mr. Bidgood when that gentleman put in an appearance.

But Mr. Bidgood held a theory of his own. The peculiar light of the water, he said, was due, he was convinced, to accumulations of engine oil that had been stirred up by the propellers of passing vessels.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the colonel derisively. "Utterly impossible. Why don't you say hair oil, and have done with it?"

"Or water on the brain?" said Captain Porter, in contemptuous tones.

That was just it! That was the sort of thing he, Mr. Bidgood, had to complain about: the persistent twisting of every incident in their daily lives to his disadvantage; the constant and studied attempts to depreciate his character before the owner. He had come on deck bursting full of a resolve to re-establish his good relations with the captain, and thus pave the way for the sympathetic reception of his news regarding the previous evening. And

this was how they met him. A scientific discussion used at once as a stepping-stone to insinuations regarding his mental capacity.

"Better water on the brain than whisky on it," he blurted out.

"Ha, ha! you're in form to-night, chief," laughed Colonel Tingle.

"Some people I know haven't got room for either—whisky or water," growled the captain with great emphasis.

"I've sailed with one or two skippers like that," retorted Mr. Bidgood heatedly. And, afraid of what he might say next, he turned and walked forward.

For some little while he felt distinctly pleased with himself. But soon this sensation wore away and he relapsed into a state of despondency. Clearly it was useless to vie with an educated man like Captain Porter, to whom years of contact with society in the shape of coal merchants, shipping agents, and such-like people had given the brain of a fox and the tongue of a serpent. Let him come down into the engine-room, and then everyone would see who was the better man.

Unfortunately, Mr. Todd did not seem to care about the engine-room. He, no doubt, knew that there was one on the *Sussex Dale*, but so far he had evinced no desire to visit it. This was rather eccentric behaviour on the part of a passenger, but for that matter on this voyage all the passengers seemed eccentric. None of them, so far, had made much of him. None of them had treated him as the guardian of the machinery should be treated. They appeared to believe that he had nothing to do but dress in a stiff shirt and eat. If any of them were to ask to be allowed to see the engines he was not at all sure that he would grant their request. Yes, he might accomplish some sort of revenge in that way. But so far none of them had asked.

He put his head in at the engine-room doorway, listened to the sound of the machinery and found it good, wiped his forehead with a new silk handkerchief, and continued his way forward.

All the cabins were dark on this occasion and seemed untenanted. As he approached that of the second mate a native stepped cautiously out, and, on seeing him, fled precipitately.

"Hallo!" muttered Mr. Bidgood. "What's this?" He followed slowly. On the forward hatch were stretched the Spaniards, to all appearances asleep. A dim lamp lit the forecastle, and exhibited a double tier of bunks, faced with wood, like pigeon-holes. Most of them were occupied. Odd garments hung over the edge of all.

On the boarded floor beneath the lamp sat the sailor, Jemaludin.

"And who was it came for'ard just now?" Mr. Bidgood asked.

"I saw nobody," answered Jemaludin stolidly.

A similar enquiry in the firemen's compartment of the forecastle gave a similar result.

"That's rum," muttered Mr. Bidgood, peering round. It was dark. He had no lamp, so after remaining a couple of minutes to give the mysterious native a chance of reappearing, he troubled no further, and, retracing his steps, mounted with much puffing to the bridge.

"It looked to me like a woman," he told the mate in recounting the incident.

"It was possibly somebody tidying up for Skinner. There are no women aboard here, not for'ard," stated Dixon. He stood up against the painted canvas wind screen. "And how are things going with you?" he asked, in dull tones.

"So-so," replied Mr. Bidgood. "So-so."

"That's just how they're going with me," said Dixon. "It's a dog's life, the sea."

"It is that," agreed Mr. Bidgood. "A thankless job." He leant on the rail, regarding with an unobservant eye the clear, dark horizon ahead.

"You've got your boiled shirt on again, I see," remarked Dixon. "I didn't go down to dinner this evening. Had mine in the mess-room with Skinner and the second."

"I see you wasn't there," Mr. Bidgood told him. "They was asking for you."

"Who was? Miss Amerton?" enquired the mate, suddenly appearing interested.

"Ay, she said she noticed a vacant space. I remember her saying so, because that colonel fellow asked if she meant me," explained Mr. Bidgood indignantly. "He said he thought she said 'face,' not 'space,' being a bit hard of hearing."

"A vacant space," exclaimed the mate bitterly. "A lot she cares!"

"I don't know what's come to you young fellars, nowadays," went on Mr. Bidgood, enlightened as to the mate's feelings by this exhibition of melancholy. "When I was your age, with them two young ladies aboard, why, you'd never have got me off the poop. I should haunt it, so I should."

"What'd be the good of that?" asked Dixon. "What chance have I got with all these colonels aboard?"

"Colonels!" exclaimed Mr. Bidgood bitterly. A thought struck him. With a backward jerk of his head he beckoned the mate to his side.

"Look 'ere, Dixon," he whispered mysteriously, "those chaps are no more colonels than I am. They're cut-throats. And if you don't want to see Miss Amerton's throat cut just keep your eyes open. I'm telling you."

"Nonsense," gasped the mate. "How do you know?"

"Never you mind," said Mr. Bidgood. "I know."

"But——"

"As for that chap Evans," continued Mr. Bidgood, in haste to avoid further questions, "he may as well shut up shop. Miss Clatworthy won't have anything to do with him, and I don't blame her either. A nasty, cantankerous devil he seems to have turned into."

"You're wrong there, anyhow," Dixon told him. "They're engaged, or as good as. He told us so in the mess-room to-night."

"You don't mean it!" said Mr. Bidgood, aghast. "Then what about the owner?"

"He says he is going to tell him what he thinks of him to-morrow."

At this news of further disaster Mr. Bidgood bowed his head despairingly over the rail. Misfortune seemed destined to sink him, in spite of all his efforts. No baling could possibly cope with such a flood. The engagement must be broken off, of course. He was uncertain whether Captain Porter's powers of jurisdiction covered engagements as well as christenings and marriages. Probably they did. But what would the owner think of a chief engineer who made a public business of such a matter? And would a successful appeal to the captain have the effect of silencing the second's tongue? The only possible answers to these questions were not of an encouraging nature. No, clearly some other path out of the difficulty must be found, and that without delay. He would give the second a little fatherly advice. He would cast himself on the mercy of the lady when nobody was looking, and beg for her assistance in his dilemma. Surely they would see that it was not at all politic to arouse the jealousy of Mr. Todd, even if selfishness blinded them to the damage their love-affair might cause to the reputation of an unoffending chief engineer.

"I say," said Dixon in his ear, "what makes you think there's anything wrong with the Tingle lot?"

"I'll tell you some other time," returned Mr. Bidgood, making to leave. "I want to see Evans at once. Do you know where he is?"

"You'll probably find them all in the mess-room," answered Dixon. "I don't think there's much in your notion."

"Do you not?" said Mr. Bidgood, rather nettled. "Well, good-night to you."

"Good-night. Mention to Skinner about what you saw in his cabin."

Mr. Bidgood did so directly he entered the mess-room. He could not have found a better method of getting rid of Skinner.

"So this is where we all are to-night," said Mr. Bidgood with a great show of jocularly when the second mate had gone. "We" comprised himself and Evans. Also there was a black bottle on which the mess-room seemed pivoted. The other furniture consisted of the table that supported the bottle, glasses, plates and dishes in a rack, and a couple of settees.

Mr. Bidgood subsided into the seat just vacated by the second mate.

"A new brand," he observed, pointing to the label on the bottle.

"I got it from Tingle," said Evans shortly.

"Um—ah," said Mr. Bidgood, waiting. "I've never tried that sort; is it all right?"

"Quite all right for the like of us—navvies," said Evans savagely. "A good enough drink for a dog like me in his kennel, while the ladies and gentlemen, in their white shirts and their gold watch-chains, drink their glasses of champagne in the saloon."

"You'd be there too if there was a vacant seat; you

know that," pointed out Mr. Bidgood soothingly. "You're getting just the same grub as we are, anyway." What more did the man want?

"Grub! Who are they all that I'm not good enough to sit at the same table with 'em?" cried Evans, replenishing his glass. "A couple of servants in hospitals. That's all they are!"

"But I thought you were getting married to Miss Clatworthy," said the bewildered Mr. Bidgood.

"Who told you that?"

"The mate, just this very minute."

"And what business is it of yours if I am?" demanded the second truculently. "As long as I do my work, that's all you've got to care about. I tell you what it is," he continued, leaning over the table and glaring at Mr. Bidgood ferociously; "you and the rest of you are getting a bit too thick. You think you can twist me round your little finger."

"No, I don't," asseverated Mr. Bidgood truthfully.

"Yes, you do," shouted Evans, rising and banging the table. "But I'll show you different. As for that swine Todd, who thinks he can come aboard and interfere with other people's women, let him look out."

"Why, he's the owner," said Mr. Bidgood, trying to appear calm. "It'd never do to hit an owner. They'd cancel your certificate." A brilliant idea occurred to him. "Look 'ere," he continued, "wait till we get to Hong Kong and then tackle him ashore."

"I won't wait a day," screamed Evans. "If I had him here now I'd——"

But what would have been Thomas Todd's fate remained unrevealed, for on the instant the door burst open and the second mate staggered in.

"Chief!" he cried in a wailing voice. "Oh God! They've pilfered me of everything!"

CHAPTER XIV

THEY looked at him aghast. "What, everything?" enquired Mr. Bidgood, surprise making him echo Skinner's last word.

"All gone, all gone!" wailed the second mate. "Nothing left."

"You don't mean it!" said Mr. Bidgood, horror-struck. "Why, if I'd known that I should have come here half an hour ago."

"That's what you ought to have done," said Evans, jumping up. "Come on, Skinner." Closely attended by the second mate he hurried from the mess-room.

Mr. Bidgood, following directly after them, walked into an uproar. Tingle, Canaba, Dixon, Evans, and Bunn were all crowding round the door of the cabin. Inside were the captain, the owner, and the second mate.

"All gone, all gone!" the latter was still wailing. It seemed to Mr. Bidgood that the shock had driven him mad.

The cabin was in terrible confusion: bedclothes and wearing apparel strewn over the bunk; an open cash-box on the washstand; the wooden sailors' chest in the middle of the floor, with a litter of books, boots, pipes, paper packages, odds and ends of cloth, cotton, tapes, bits of iron, and other rubbish littered around. And among all this the second mate, on hands and knees, was searching feverishly, giving note the while to his misery.

"What's gone?" enquired Captain Porter from the settee.

"Everything," moaned the second mate, looking up. "My money, and—oh, God! it's gone too. My p-p—" He began to cry.

"Can I be of any assistance, Mr. Todd?" asked Mr. Bidgood, entering the cabin, and turning down the lamp, which, he had noticed, was smoking dangerously.

"There he is," screamed the second mate, rising on his knees, and pointing in weak passion. "He knows all about it. He came into my cabin once and saw it. He's got it. Search him! Oh God!" He began to whimper again.

"What's this I hear, Bidgood?" enquired Captain Porter brusquely. "Explain yourself."

"He broke into my cabin only a day or two ago, sir," whined the second mate. "But I was there and he could do nothing."

"I thought the lamp was smoking," said Mr. Bidgood aghast.

"Oh, you did, did you?" retorted the captain, eyeing him.

"Very thin, very thin indeed," remarked the colonel from the door.

"Mr. Dixon," said the captain, "will you state again what you know of the robbery? You said just now that the chief engineer informed you of it."

"Mr. Bidgood came on the bridge about half an hour ago, and said he had seen somebody leave the second mate's cabin. He——"

"Hold on," said Captain Porter. "What were his actions like? Did he appear excited?"

"He was a bit queer," confessed the mate. "Warned me that there were a lot of rascals on board and that I'd have to keep an eye open."

"Ah!" said the captain. "We've heard of trying to put the blame on somebody else before now. It's an old dodge."

"I thought the lamp was smoking," cried Mr. Bidgood, his head all gone. "You know I did, don't you now?" he added, turning to the second mate.

"Search him! Search him!" cried those at the door.

"Wait a moment," said Thomas Todd with great decision. "Let us hear your story, Mr. Evans. I believe that you and the chief engineer were seated in the mess-room, when the second mate came along with the news of his loss. Now, how did the chief engineer receive the news?"

"Didn't seem much put out," said Evans gruffly.

"Did he say anything?"

"Yes. The second mate said he had been robbed of everything, and Mr. Bidgood said, 'You don't mean it. What? Everything?'"

"Meaning to say that he wasn't surprised to hear that Skinner had lost his money, you see, sir," pointed out Captain Porter.

"I didn't," cried Mr. Bidgood wildly. "I was never more surprised in my life."

"Surprised to hear he'd lost his money?" asked the captain.

"Aye."

"Then you knew he had some," said Captain Porter like a knife. "There you are, Mr. Todd. I don't think we need look far for the culprit."

"I was looking for smoky lamps. He knows I was," cried Mr. Bidgood desperately. Oh, drat it! Was not the ground under his feet crumbling enough already without all this malevolent poking? Why did they harass him so? Why did Fate corner him thus? Was there not a man left among them who knew that he was not what they thought

him ; who would still accept his word, sworn if required ? He looked wildly round.

" Mr. Todd," he said, " I declare to my goodness I know nothing at all about this."

" A likely tale," sneered the captain.

" He does, he does. I know it," screamed the second mate.

" You will have to produce a lot of proof before you can make me believe that Mr. Bidgood would descend to pilfering," said Thomas Todd with much firmness. " If any searching has to be done among us, Captain Porter, I shall ask you to begin with my cabin, and then go on to those of the other passengers, who like myself, are strangers to the ship. You will not object to that, Colonel Tingle ? " he enquired.

" Oh—er—no," replied the colonel blankly. " Not at all, not at all." His voice, however, as everybody might have noticed, was painfully lacking in enthusiasm. " Why not search first among the crew, and so on ? " he suggested, a little more brightly.

" I think so too," agreed Thomas Todd. " We are wasting time here. You must come, all. Mr. Bidgood, stick close to me."

Putting his hand on the chief engineer's shoulder, he urged him gently from the cabin. The whole party moved forward.

It was very dark on deck. Dim lights shewed in the fore-castle. A buzz of tongues indicated a stir among the crew.

" Stand on this side of the hatch, colonel," said Thomas Todd with astonishing decision, " and you, Captain Porter, take the other. Allow nobody to pass you."

With Mr. Bidgood in the closest attendance he advanced, followed by Evans and the mate.

"Hallo there!" cried the latter as they went along.
"*Kasi lampau*. Bring a lamp."

Two or three of the sailors appeared, Malays wearing sarongs and naked to the waist. Leaving Evans on guard at the door of the other side of the forecastle, the mate accosted them, and entered their abode. A few men off watch were lying in their bunks, and they, when ordered, at once arose and took their places in a wild looking line against the inner wall. There were some nine or ten of them, muscular, shock-headed fellows, wide-chested and hairy-limbed. The mate swung his hurricane lamp along their front, and announced that all except those on duty were there.

"Then shut the door, please, Mr. Bidgood, and we'll search their beds—I mean bunks," said the owner.

Mr. Bidgood left the owner for a moment and obeyed orders. It was close, warm work, and already he was in a bath of perspiration. The small lamp that hung from the low, riveted ceiling was smoking violently, but the air inside this confined segment of the bows, in which the sailors dwelt, was rank enough, he felt, to make anything either smoke or want to. So he made no attempt to put the matter right, but crossed over and assisted the owner to search the bunks.

There were a dozen patterned, finely plaited sleeping mats; several stiff red bolsters with embroidered ends, family relics that had never known soap; there were crimson bundles containing sarongs the colours of which would have gladdened the heart of a Highlander; yellow tin boxes with weird brass locks and still weirder contents; palm leaf cases; betel nuts, bananas, socks, canvas shoes, jack fruit, bread, all heaped together anyhow.

"Nothing in here so far as can be seen," said Thomas Todd.

Mr. Bidgood, after taking the mate's lamp and making a palsied attempt to crawl underneath the bunks, was brought to admit that there was not.

Thomas Todd adjusted his glasses and surveyed the crew who stood by looking on stolidly. "Dear me," he said, "they don't seem to mind much."

"No, sir," agreed the mate. "The fact of the matter is," he continued hesitatingly, "a Malay is never surprised at anything Europeans do, as he has a firm conviction that they are always intoxicated."

"Really, you don't say so!" said Thomas Todd, looking from one to the other. "It's hardly believable."

"Maybe it's true," said Mr. Bidgood. "Not that anyone would think you were intoxicated just now, sir," he added hastily.

"Indeed. Well, I hope not; sincerely, sincerely," returned the owner. "Shall we go on now and see the firemen?"

In spite of Mr. Bidgood's efforts they made a failure there too. Long bamboo pipes with tiny bowls, filth, grease, dirt, rags, blue dungaree, packets of tea and papers of yellow tobacco, a square-faced bottle or two; all these they found. But, except for a few dollars, no money. The atmosphere was hideous with the smoke of Chinese tobacco, and they came out choking.

"An abominable smell. It reminds me of a mixture of strong acid and rotten eggs," said Thomas Todd. "Can you suggest anywhere else to search?" he asked the mate.

"We might try the chain locker," replied that gentleman doubtfully. "Nothing in here, I s'pose," he went on, opening a small cupboard.

Something jumped out, knocking the lamp from his hand, and, with a butt at the astonished Mr. Bidgood, sped down the deck.

"Hi! Hi!" yelled Mr. Bidgood, but all to no purpose.

"Hold him," shouted the owner.

Evans and Dixon rushed away in chase. The lamp was out, and in the gloom their dark figures were barely visible. But the sound of scuffling and scraping and panting was very soon to be heard, and then, quick on top of it, a prolonged shriek.

"Got him," called out Tingle in his high voice.

"It sounded like a woman," remarked Thomas Todd, very concerned. He lit the lamp.

"Aye did it," agreed Mr. Bidgood. "I thought it'd turn out to be a woman," he added as they hurried down the deck.

"It's a she," Tingle told them.

"But she has none of the stolen property on her," added Canaba. "I've searched her pretty well already." He laughed coarsely.

Thomas Todd, holding up the lamp, saw a middle-aged Malay woman, her arms in the grip of the pair of them. Her oiled hair was tumbled. Her white baju was torn open, revealing her yellow body nearly to the waist. A white belt held her sarong in place.

She gazed at the owner intrepidly, to all appearance undismayed, and when the serang, Tinggal, came up she spoke in a low, quick tone.

"The Tuan is mistaken a little," said the serang to the mate in Malay. "This lady is a passenger, on board by the permission of Tuan Skinner."

The mate translated.

"Dear me," exclaimed Thomas Todd. "Well, don't let her go."

"It was a woman I saw leaving Skinner's cabin," Mr. Bidgood reminded them.

"Ay, so you say," said Captain Porter.

Thomas Todd enquired about her luggage. From her

answer as translated by the mate, it appeared she had none.

"Whoever heard of such a thing?" cried Tingle. "It's against nature."

"She must at least have something," agreed Thomas Todd. "Well—er—will you please hold her—very gently, Mr. Evans; we must go and search in the chain locker."

It was Mr. Bidgood who snatched up the lamp and led the way: it was Mr. Bidgood who, when an inspection from above had revealed nothing, volunteered to descend into the black depths and make doubt a certainty.

They assisted him through the narrow doorway. They heard the rattle of his feet on the heap of chains, as, lamp in hand, he explored the corners. And presently they heard his ejaculation of surprise.

"What's the matter?" called out the mate.

"Why, there's somebody down here after all," shouted Mr. Bidgood. He scrambled back over the chains, and revealed an astonished visage. "He's sitting on a bundle and staring at me awful."

"Tell him to get up and come on deck," said the mate.

Mr. Bidgood loudly did so. "It's no good," he reported. "He seems hard of hearing or something."

"Tinggal," cried the mate impatiently. "Come and get the fellow out."

On hearing this, Mr. Bidgood with great bravery disappeared again, and at once stumbled back, bearing in his arms a small, malevolent looking Malay gentleman, whom he passed up through the door. From the volley of words that issued from the gentleman's mouth, it was plain that he was angry.

"What does he say?" asked Thomas Todd.

"Apparently he's another of Mr. Skinner's passengers, sir," replied the mate.

"Most extraordinary. The ship seems alive with passengers. Dear me!" said Thomas Todd, rather irritated.

"Well, well, ask him what he was doing in the chain locker."

The mate asked him. It seemed that he had been sitting there because he liked it.

"Nonsense! I don't believe him for an instant," remarked Thomas Todd. "We will take him with us to the woman."

Mr. Bidgood followed with the bundle, and laid it on the hatch. They made a ring round him while he opened it. There were two or three lamps held high among them now. Somebody called the second mate, and he came hurrying into the circle of light just as Mr. Bidgood raised aloft his first find, a gaudy sarong.

"Does that belong to you?" asked Thomas Todd.

The second mate, after a long look, shook his head.

"Does that, now, or that, or that?" asked Todd as Mr. Bidgood rapidly held up kabayas, bajus, veils, gold combs, necklets, bangles, stockings, and flung them on the hatch. The second mate was unable to lay claim to any of them. Even two or three bundles of dollars neatly rolled in newspaper he could not swear to, at least not in the short time that was given to him.

"There's nought else but this," announced Mr. Bidgood at length in a tone of disappointment. He shewed a piece of neatly folded canvas.

"Why don't you undo it, Mr. Bidgood?" asked the owner.

"Yes, undo it," echoed the colonel in an altered voice. He took an eager step forward. "Great Scott!" he exclaimed, and stood gazing.

For, at the command of the owner, Mr. Bidgood raising both hands had allowed the canvas to flap open, revealing, to the astonishment of everyone, a gaudy picture of a black-bearded man in a sky-blue uniform; a picture

pointed with jewels, from which every movement of the swaying lamps drew fire ; a picture to all appearance worth the ransom of a king.

"Never! Yes! Dear me!" exclaimed Thomas Todd, in great surprise. "Why, it's Don Carlos himself."

"Where did you get it? Tell me or I'll take you to the police station," screamed the colonel suddenly. He seized the small Malay passenger and shook him.

"You mustn't do that," said Thomas Todd, sharply interfering. "It's nothing to do with you!"

"Holy Virgin! You say it's nothing to do with us," shouted Canaba excitedly.

"Nothing to do with us!" screamed Tingle. "Why, do you know, sir, that this picture was stolen——"

Canaba, suddenly calm again, rapped out something in Spanish.

"I've no doubt it was stolen," said Thomas Todd very sharply. He seemed to be above himself that evening. "But it can't be yours. Yours was burnt in your house at the foot of the Andes. You told us so the day before yesterday."

"I didn't say that it was mine," retorted the colonel, making an obvious effort to control himself. "I shook him because I wanted to frighten him; to extort a confession if possible; to let him see that he was in the hands of men who would stand no nonsense. I can tell you this, sir," he added in an access of fury, "were I in charge of this vessel, I would hang the fellow on the nearest tree."

"But there aren't any trees," pointed out Mr. Bidgood, folding up the picture.

"Mast, yard arm then, you . . . you turnip," hissed the colonel, glaring. He linked his arm in Señor Canaba's, and the two marched towards the alley-way.

Mr. Bidgood stood rooted to the deck. A turnip, an uninteresting vegetable, with no head to speak of, always

getting into hot water—always being served with sauce. A turnip! This was how they described him.

"You're a bald-headed old tomato," he shouted after them, losing control of himself.

"How dare you use such an expression on my ship?" demanded Captain Porter with a great shew of indignation.

The colonel came running back. "Say that again!" he cried threateningly.

To his own intense astonishment, Mr. Bidgood did so. The recollection of it pleased him for weeks. There could not be much wrong with the nerve of a man who defied Captain Porter on his own deck, and whose majestic look was sufficient to quell a fire-eater like Colonel Tingle. At that moment, this revelation of his own possibilities heated him like wine. He saw the owner come between them with outstretched arms, heard himself announcing that if anyone was looking for trouble, they had found the right spot, heard the astonished exclamation of Captain Porter and the admiring murmur of the mate. Then Canaba led the colonel away.

"Really, Mr. Bidgood, really," said Thomas Todd in mild accents. He took the folded picture. Mr. Bidgood, standing once more on his heels, allowed himself to shrink a little.

"I can't have these goings-on aboard my ship," announced Captain Porter.

"I should have done the same myself," returned Thomas Todd. "Colonel Tingle was very, very provoking. Besides, captain," he added deliberately, "it's not your ship; it's mine."

Never before had Mr. Bidgood known his superior to receive such a reproof. Never before had he seen him look so staggered.

But the owner did not appear aware of the deadly blow he had dealt. His attention was now occupied with the

two prisoners. He asked the second mate how they had come to be on board. The second mate denied all knowledge of them.

"He lies," said the woman slowly, in English. "He is a rotten man. He has accepted our money and wishes to deceive us." She had arranged her dress, and now began to coil her hair in place, watching them the while with sullen eyes.

"What have you done with the money you took?" asked Mr. Bidgood severely. "I saw you leaving the cabin."

"You have searched," said the woman, "and you have found nothing. Leave us in peace. I take only what is my own."

"Give me what you took, you old hag," cried the second mate, advancing on her. Mr. Bidgood pushed him back. He fell against the hatch, and once more began to whimper.

"There does not seem to be much against them," remarked the owner. "You had better let them go."

"May they take their things?" asked the mate.

"Put the bundle together again," said Thomas Todd. "I do not know what to do with it yet. Where did you get the picture?" he asked the woman.

She did not reply, but instead spoke in a low voice to her companion.

"Ask him where he got it, Mr. Dixon," requested Thomas Todd.

The mate spoke in Malay, and the malevolent looking old gentleman answered volubly.

"He says they obtained it from their next door neighbours in Ceylon," translated the mate.

"In that case I'd perhaps better take the bundle myself," said Thomas Todd.

"Give me at least my clothes," urged the woman in English.

The owner, taking no further heed of anyone, put the bundle under his arm and walked away.

"I suppose he'll look further into matters to-morrow," observed the mate.

"He can do what he likes ; it's his ship," burst out Captain Porter. "I wash my hands of everything." He went through the motion of doing so. Mr. Bidgood could not help but note the man's emotion, but he had used so much of his stock of pity on himself during the past few days that he had none left for anyone else. After all, it was only right that others should be awarded their share of suffering. The captain would be the better for the snubbing in the long run, more tolerant of the faults of others, more able to appreciate the value of a comrade and to help him over a stile when necessary.

It now seemed to Mr. Bidgood that for himself a better day was dawning. The owner of the *Susan Dale*, obviously impressed by his quality, was treating him more like a companion than an employé. And where the owner led, the rest could but follow. He was wondering dreamily whether anyone envied him, and whether they all thought he deserved it, when he caught the sound of his name.

"Don't you worry yourself, Skinner," the captain was saying. "We haven't forgot what you told us about this chap, Bidgood, trying to break in. His'll be the first place searched in the morning. I'll have another talk with Todd myself and see to that."

CHAPTER XV

GLOOM, again seizing Mr. Bidgood at the captain's speech, held him throughout the troublous night, and was still there, visible in the glass, when he examined his face next morning.

It was the face of a football of Fate ; ruddy, yet hollow-eyed, fat and unhappy, worn, but not so very old. On the lower part of it a black beard had taken root and grew luxuriantly. Sheep, not a barber, might have cropped his hair. His low forehead and puzzled blue eyes also suggested mutton. But his body said beef, and plenty of it. Those two brawny arms were never nourished on beans and bananas. Neither was that hairy chest. Neither, for that matter, was that nose.

But, as everyone is aware, the colour of the nose is no index of the soul within. Wine is red, but so is the lamp outside a chemist's shop. And if Mr. Bidgood's appearance hinted at the former, his expression would not have disgraced the latter.

He was attired in the same red singlet. But on this occasion the tails of it drooped, surplice like, about him, there being nothing to tuck them in to.

"Will you open the door?" enquired a fresh young voice outside. Mr. Bidgood made an obvious reply.

"Drat that Miss Amerton," he added to himself, and began hastily to busy himself with the buttons of a clean white suit.

"You are a lazy man," went on the voice. "We've all had breakfast. It's simply lovely on deck. And there's land right in front of us—Sumatra."

"All right," said Bidgood in a tone as short as his attire. "Just coming." Really, it seemed barely decent to hold a conversation with a lady dressed as he was, even though an inch thick door screened him. He hastened to set things right.

"I hope you are putting on your blue uniform," continued Mary Amerton. He was not. The fact of her mentioning the matter at that moment was a coincidence, annoying in its fitness. He discarded the white garment he was holding in favour of the blue pair.

"All right, miss, go away," he called out irritably. "I shall be up there in two twos."

"Very well," said Mary. "I'm sorry. Please don't be angry." He heard her walk off.

"I'll give some of 'em 'angry,'" growled Mr. Bidgood as he attired himself.

He went on deck prepared to do so.

"Good-morning," said Helen, coming towards him smiling. "You're awfully good to have put on the uniform." They shook hands.

"Don't say a word about it. Very glad to be of service to you," replied Mr. Bidgood. He had no quarrel with her. Anything in the male line, except of course the owner, would find him dangerous all the same.

"Where shall we stand him to-day?" enquired Thomas Todd.

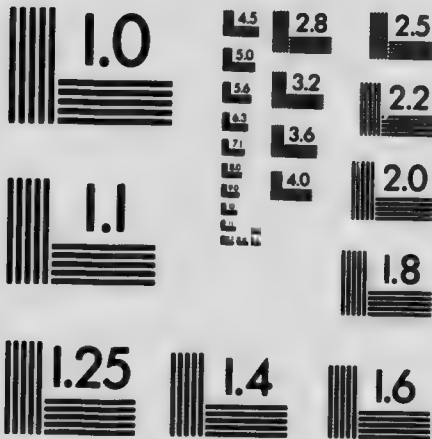
"I think the same place as yesterday will do," replied Helen. "The light came from just the right direction."

Once again Mr. Bidgood found himself holding the sceptre that was not an umbrella and gazing condescendingly in front of him. But to-day he seemed only a side



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show. Nobody except the artist shewed any interest in the picture.

She worked industriously enough ; she appeared, in fact, as if she would never tire. He, as time wore on and the sun brought all its batteries to bear, began to experience symptoms of fatigue, and also of boredom. He caught himself drooping in a most unkingly manner, and with a start squared his shoulders again, and looked round to see if anyone had witnessed his indiscretion. But the others were engaged elsewhere.

Mary Amerton and Canaba had retreated to the very stern of the ship, and one might gather from their looks that they had no interest whatever in what was going on almost under their noses. The other three, the owner, the captain, and the colonel, with their backs turned on Art, leant against the rail and talked. Try as he would he could not hear a word of their conversation. Something was being discussed, something of a private nature, something that could only be spoken of in a low voice. Was it possible that they were discussing his character ; that oily-tongued Captain Porter was proving to the owner that he hadn't one ? Only too probable, instinct told him.

There was the mystery of last night's robbery yet to be solved ; he could not forget that he might still be under suspicion, for the second mate's money had not, so far, been discovered. What further action they intended to take in the matter he did not know. There had been some talk of a search. Well, they could search until they were black in the face ; he would be glad of it. Happy thought ! He would demand a search ! Let them strip him ! Turn out his cabin ! Turn out the engine-room ! He made a hasty review of the things they might discover, ransacking every box and cupboard, counting every bottle. It would be a painful business, but at any rate his blushes would be honest ones. Moreover, the owner had never visited the

engine-room, and there was a possibility that the favourable impression he could not help receiving from its appearance might go far towards counteracting the effects of Captain Porter's crafty tongue. Thus out of evil might come good. They could search there for ever and only bring to light fresh evidence of his efficiency as chief engineer.

It was an excellent idea. He pictured to himself the captain crawling through bilges, under boilers, up the tunnel, under the stokehold, searching the tool-room, the store-room, the waste locker. . . .

"Drat it," exclaimed Mr. Bidgood, growing red all over.

"What did you say?" Helen asked, looking up from her work.

"Nothing, nothing to speak of," said Mr. Bidgood. He had forgotten all about the other barrel of gunpowder for the moment. There it was, lying hidden among the waste, a little bloated thing ready either to blast his reputation or to blow up the ship. How unimportant his action in taking these barrels had seemed at the time. On a par with the selling of the sweepings of a rice cargo by the mate, or the pocketing of a commission from a ship's chandler by the captain. Nobody but a ship owner would think much the worse of him for it. But ship owners viewed these matters differently, and his possession of the barrel would certainly incline Mr. Todd to the idea that he had taken the second mate's dollars.

There must be no search. And yet, if nothing were discovered, and he himself did not come forward and make a clean breast of it, they all stood a fair chance of being blown up and having their throats cut. Another worry, and one which called for immediate action, was this disastrous engagement between Evans and Miss Clatworthy.

"I shall have to tackle her this morning," he told himself, eying her ruminatively.

She looked up, caught his eye, and smiled encouragingly.

"Cheer up, Mr. Bidgood," she said. "I shall not keep you much longer."

A nice girl ! How would she look with her throat cut ? And all depended on him !

"How are things going ?" asked Thomas Todd, walking over to the easel.

"Splendidly. I never had a more patient model. Do you think it's at all like ?"

"Couldn't be better," answered Thomas Todd. "What do you say, Colonel Tingle ?"

The colonel, after a perfunctory look, agreed.

"Nothing you would wish altered ?" asked Helen, standing up. "A few medals on the tunic, perhaps ?"

"Just as you like, Miss Clatworthy," replied the colonel, yawning.

"I suppose, miss, you couldn't put a roll of dollars in his trousers' pocket ?" enquired Captain Porter with a hoarse chuckle.

The colonel joined in the chuckle. Mr. Todd did not. "Any more speeches of that description and I'll have every cabin searched," he said sharply.

The abashed captain explained that he had made a joke, and would apologise for doing so. It appeared that he would welcome a search.

"So would Mr. Bidgood, I'm sure," retorted the owner, "but Colonel Tingle objects strongly."

With a dramatic movement Mr. Bidgood turned both his trousers' pockets inside out, and stood silently confronting Tingle and Captain Porter, his eyes blazing. Then, trembling with indignation, and without a word, he left the poop.

"Really, I think you people might be more careful about what you say," Thomas Todd remarked, looking indignant. "Let me help to carry these things for you, Miss Clatworthy."

"What was it all about?" she asked, as they walked along the deck together a minute later.

The owner told her. By the time the story was ended the canvas and paints were stored away, and he and she were standing together outside her cabin door.

"I'm not going to have a search," he added. "I've thought it over carefully and I've decided not to. There—you're the only one I've told that to."

"Many thanks, sir," she said coquettishly. "Oh why do you confide in me?" she asked, serious again. "I might tell everyone."

"I don't think so," said Thomas Todd earnestly.

She met his eyes and looked down, colouring.

"And Mr. Bidgood?" she asked after one breathless instant, her mind obviously in confusion.

"Bother Bidgood!" said Thomas Todd. "Oh, I'm so sorry. I'm afraid I was rude."

"Not at all," said Helen, calm again. "But he's such a nice old man, and I don't like to see him taken advantage of. I've only known him—let me see—three days. And I'm very fond of him already."

"Three days is a short time," remarked Thomas Todd, looking despondent.

"Though, of course, on a steamer——" continued Helen, relenting.

"Exactly," said Thomas Todd. "People get to know each other quickly on board ship. A day at sea is as good as three weeks ashore. I feel to have known you a long time. Indeed, I feel as though I could never know you better," he continued eloquently. "Really, it's most extraordinary how I feel. I——"

"I must go," interposed Helen hurriedly. "Mary will be wondering where I am."

She left him standing, and walked quickly towards the poop.

It was a cheerful ship that morning. Mr. Bidgood even, as he stood at the foot of the ladder obviously awaiting her, might have been Father Christmas, or Father Neptune, so glad did he seem to see her.

"Oh, Mr. Bidgood," she said, descending.

"Good-morning, miss," said Mr. Bidgood uncomfortably. He had parted from her only half an hour ago. "Might I have a private word with you?"

"Why, certainly," said Helen. She followed him into the alley-way, wondering.

"It's like this," explained Mr. Bidgood, getting her into a corner, and twiddling a button on his jacket nervously. "Of course, as we all know, boys will be boys and girls will be girls. Not that I blame them."

"No?" said Helen, waiting.

"Certainly not," asseverated Mr. Bidgood with great heartiness. "I've been the same way myself. Many a lass has had her eye on me. They can't help it. It's all in the course of nature."

"I don't understand you," said Helen.

"It's strange who they do get their eye on," continued Mr. Bidgood ponderously. "If they only knew what they was doing, they'd take it off pretty smart."

He looked at Helen solemnly. She seemed to be impressed.

"Some fellows I know of," he went on, "are like white-washed rabbit hutches; fair to look on without, but awful rotten within."

"That's true," agreed Helen. "But—are you unwell this morning, Mr. Bidgood? Oh——"

The entire half of Mr. Bidgood's face was engaged in a slow and emphatic wink. He raised a podgy forefinger, and with it struck the side of his nose repeatedly. "Maybe one of these days when you're lyin' dyin' in some garret, miss, you will remember my words. I have known your

seeandsee for some time, and I hope you'll make a decent man of him. I suppose I ought to congratulate you on your engagement——"

"My engagement!" exclaimed Helen in great surprise. "Whoever told you——?"

"He told me himself last night," said Mr. Bidgood, with a sad smile.

"How could he? How could it be possible——?"

"We was sittin' round in the mess-room, 'aving a quiet nip," explained Mr. Bidgood. "Or at any rate he was 'aving a quiet nip out of a bottle that the colonel had given him. In fact he'd finished about half the bottle an' was pretty well on. And when he gets like that, miss, there's no holding of him. He's nasty, so don't say afterwards I didn't tell you."

"I don't believe it," said Helen, growing pale.

"Ah, you don't know him like I do," Mr. Bidgood said darkly. "Mark my words," he continued, wagging a forefinger. "Don't cross him; and for any favour don't let it out about your engagement aboard this ship. It'll cause trouble if you do, as sure as anything."

"But this is most absurd," Helen said. "I'm not engaged. At least——"

"Oh, you needn't mind me knowing," Mr. Bidgood assured her. "Me and him and one or two more. We shan't say anything. If you want to," he continued, struck with a brilliant idea, "you can slip down now and again to the engine-room, and have a bit of a chat with him there, like. I'll see you all right."

He walked a few steps, put his head in at the engine-room doorway and shouted for the second engineer. "He'll put things straight," he said to her, nodding reassuringly. "You just tell him what I said. Not what I said about him," he explained hastily. "What I said about the engine-room and not letting Mr. Todd know."

"Mr. Todd! Why—you don't mean that Mr. Evans says he is engaged to me?" asked Helen angrily. But Mr. Bidgood, after another knowing wink, had turned and was now hastening forward.

She called out after him, but his solid, satisfied figure never halted. It filled the alley-way as a pea does a pea-shooter. Her voice seemed to impel him onwards.

"What a wretched mistake," she murmured indignantly. Looking round she saw Evans appear in the doorway of the engine-room. She saw him shrink back at the sight of her, and, running forward, she called him by name, as he clattered down the steel ladder which led to the platform.

He came back, obviously reluctant, and stood inside the doorway.

"Well, what can I do for you?" he asked, taking no notice of her greeting.

"—I——" stammered Helen, who could not have been otherwise than a little surprised and intimidated by his manner. His eyes looked at her as at an enemy; his small, dark face was set.

"Something Mr. Bidgood told me just now gave me courage to call you. I am sorry to interrupt your work," she went on in some hesitation.

"Oh, don't mind me," said Evans harshly. "On duty I'm at the beck and call of anyone." He pulled a sweat rag from his leather belt, and, lifting his greasy deep-sea cap, wiped his forehead. "Come," he said after a moment. "What do you want? I'm in a hurry."

Her white dress emphasised the griminess of the walls, the damp and filthiness of the deck, and the squalor of his apparel.

"You must be very busy, I am sure of that," she said. "Since we have been on board we have scarcely seen you."

"Come, tell me what you want," he said again.

"There's a rumour about," said Helen in a voice which

had gathered firmness. "An absurd rumour, induced I suppose by the fact of your being instrumental in our coming on board, that really it's so silly that I'm almost ashamed to tell you. Mr. Bidgood mentioned it to me just now. People think that we are—in fact that there is an engagement between us."

"Oh, do they?" returned Evans. "Well, there isn't, and there isn't likely to be," he added insolently.

"Of course not," she returned, looking at him. "People get hold of such strange ideas. Mr. Bidgood was under the impression that you yourself told him."

There was a question in her voice, but Evans did not answer it. His eyes moved from her face. "Well, what do you want of me?" he asked.

"Why, naturally, to contradict the rumour everywhere," she said, looking surprised.

"Oh, you do; that's very kind," said Evans with a harsh laugh. "I shan't do anything of the sort." He turned and descended the ladder a step or two. "You want me to help you to a rich husband, my lady, but you've come to the wrong shop," he added.

"That's quite untrue," said Helen in a controlled voice.

"So I'm a liar as well!" cried Evans loudly. "Do you think I'm blind? That I can't see what your game is? I was good enough once. Now I'm dirt. Not fine enough to sit at the same table with you even. Not that I want you."

"You're quite mistaken! You're very unjust!"

"Tell that swine Todd I'm not engaged to you!" cried Evans in uncontrolled passion. "Do you take me for a fool? Do you think I'm to be trodden on? I'll tell him I *am* engaged to you!"

"Don't be foolish, Mr. Evans," Helen said angrily. "You'd never dare."

In answer he sprang past her and ran out of the alley-way towards the poop.

Meanwhile Mr. Bidgood had gone forward, and regardless of anyone on the bridge who might be looking at him, had, with pomp and circumstance, examined a winch.

Things had gone better than he hoped. The young lady had proved unexpectedly pliable, and (marvellous, so it seemed to him) was evidently as anxious for secrecy as he was. What the upshot of her interview with the second engineer would be, he had not much doubt. Fresh from his hand, and with the terrible necessity for caution impressed upon her, she would not fail him. As a piece of diplomacy the whole thing was wonderfully neat, and reflected great credit on him. He chuckled to himself as he walked aft again, with the signs of his profession, in the shape of black grease marks, visible about his hands and jacket. How astonished she had appeared when he had called Evans and left her. A nice-looking girl, with no nonsense about her. Quite wasted on Evans, but, so long as they confined their love-making to the engine-room, that did not matter. He wondered what they were saying now in the other alley-way. He had sown a seed, and would have liked to witness it grow.

On his journey aft he came across another winch, and, paying no attention to Mr. Todd, who, it seemed to him, lacked company, he paused again. Here was the spot on which he had sat but a night or two before. There was the winch valve he had handled so resolutely. Over yonder brown and sun-soaked hatch the man Bunn had scrambled. There were dangers yet to be faced, more deeds to be done. The thought made his hand tremble slightly as he went round the various bolts and nuts.

"Still busy, Mr. Bidgood?" Thomas Todd called out from the poop.

At this Mr. Bidgood hastened aft in order to explain why it was that the work of a conscientious chief engineer never ended.

He was half-way up the ladder leading to the poop when the sound of someone running quickly over the deck made him pause and look round.

"Let me pass," shouted the second, rushing up to him. Mr. Bidgood, much astonished, sat down on a step.

"What's the matter, Mr. Evans?" Thomas Todd enquired from above. "Something wrong with the engine?"

"Let me get at him," cried the second, attempting to walk over Mr. Bidgood.

"I won't," said Mr. Bidgood resolutely, hanging on to him.

"What do you mean by interfering with my girl?" screamed the second to Thomas Todd. "She's engaged to me! I'll break your head! Call yourself the owner! A plucky owner! I call you a——"

Mr. Bidgood, putting forth all his strength, drew him down and clapped a hand over his mouth.

CHAPTER XVI

STANDING in the half darkness of the alley-way, Helen looked out into the dazzling sunlight, and witnessed nearly everything. Against a yellow painted background, balanced for a moment on a short and spidery ladder, there writhed what might have been a booted sea monster clad in blue and white. Then a large hand appeared, and the whole struggling mass bumped down the ladder step by step, and lay contorted on the rusty deck.

At the appearance in the picture of Mr. Todd, and the sound of hurrying footsteps overhead, she turned and walked quickly forward. Her face was set ; her eyes were hard and sad. She sought the vessel's side, and there for a while, careless of her hands, stood clasping the rusty angle iron that topped the bulwarks. Her breast was heaving. She looked fierce and almost young. " I'll never forgive that man Evans," she murmured. " How—what will he think ? I'd have given anything rather—the chief engineer—why did he want to interfere ?—but he's a fool, that man. I——" She gripped the bulwarks hard with both hands and, standing rigid, stared out at the limpid sea. Presently she relaxed a little, and said to herself, " I wonder if Mr. Evans hurt him. Perhaps I ought to have gone to see. How foolish to lose my head like that. No, perhaps it's as well. It wouldn't do for him to know I saw what happened. He—oh ! I'll never forgive that man ! " She grew rigid

again. "Oh, this nursing, nursing, nursing!" she muttered.

Thomas Todd talked about nursing that afternoon when he sought her out, bearing a cup of tea for her. Walking, figuratively, just a shade behind her, and yet leading her on, he went round most of the London hospitals. It was rather tiring. She tried to get off the subject *via* the weather.

"Really; that reminds me . . . I think St. Swithin's is one of the best of the hospitals," said Thomas Todd, leading her back.

He found her in agreement with him.

"The operating theatre——?" he suggested.

"Very fine, I understand," she said. "Have you ever had an oper——?"

"Dear me, no," said Thomas Todd hastily. "I think Lister——" he was proceeding.

"I wish you had."

"Me!—Really, I——"

"No, no. I put it wrongly. I mean I wish you had come into personal contact with some of our nurses at the big hospitals. You would appreciate, I'm certain, what self-sacrificing lives they lead."

"I am certain of it," said Thomas Todd emphatically. "I can appreciate it even without undergoing a surgical operation. Yours is a noble profession, Miss Clatworthy."

"I am glad you think so," she returned, thanking him with a smile.

"And I am sure you——" he was proceeding warmly. "You——er," he suddenly checked himself. "I was about to say that Lister, with his wonderful discovery of——er——I'm never quite sure whether it was antiseptics or anæsthetics——?"

"Antiseptics."

"Thank you," said Thomas Todd.

"I have some on board with me—carbolic," continued Helen quickly. "If ever you want any don't hesitate to ask."

"Thank you," said Thomas Todd. "But—er—I—but of course anæsthetics, that is antisept—"

"You can never tell in these tropical places," Helen went on, in rather a desperate way. "Why, for instance, leprosy might lurk in the very chair you are sitting on."

"Dear me. You don't say so?" exclaimed Thomas Todd, moving uneasily.

"It takes three years to develop in the system. A scratch—and contagion—"

"Is that a fact?" asked Thomas Todd in concern, looking at his hands.

"Promise me, Mr. Todd, if ever you cut your finger you'll come to me."

"I will," said Thomas Todd emphatically. He continued to look at his hands. "Do you think—er—?" he began anxiously.

"Oh, Mr. Todd! Why didn't you tell me before?" she cried, bending over. She held his hand.

"I did it this morning while stropping my razor," he said prosaically.

A shaft of sunlight caught her yellow hair when she bent down to examine the finger.

"Does it feel painful when I press it there?" she murmured, both hands engaged.

"No-o," said Thomas Todd.

"There then?"

"No. Dear me, no." Involuntarily his clasp tightened. Dear me! Was it possible that for a fraction of a second hers did also? He blushed, refusing to consider the question.

"I don't think you need have any fear; it seems quite

healthy," she decided, relinquishing the hand and smiling at him reassuringly. "I'll get a small dressing, though, and put on it." She rose. His glasses dropped. When he had recovered them she was gone.

Watching, he beheld her ascend the steps that led to the bridge deck, and walk quickly forward towards her cabin. Her step was firm and decided, her head held high. She disappeared, and he sank back in his chair, sighing slightly. Not for such an adventure as this had he come out East. This was not at all the right path for him, he knew, but in some way or other he had wandered on it. Never before! had he found a path so full of interest. Perhaps it was the novelty.

"I wish she wouldn't be so kind," he said testily, making an effort. He had not noticed before how yellow her hair was. How close he had been to it a moment or two before! The scent seemed to linger with him yet. He got up and paced the deck, trying to think of what arrangements he would have to make for getting all the passengers safely landed at Hong Kong. She seemed to be a long while in coming back.

"Miss Amerton kept me talking to her," she told him in explanation on her return.

"Really?" said Thomas Todd, standing with his arm stretched out, and the affected finger extended.

"Yes," said Helen, bandaging; "she was in the cabin, conversing with that Malay woman you caught last night. Mary is very keen to have her as an ayah while we are on board. She made me promise to ask you about it."

"I hope you'll do as you like," he told her doubtfully. "Rather an unsatisfactory servant, won't she make? Don't you think so?"

"No worse than any other, perhaps," Helen answered. "Besides, we have nothing to steal," she added, laughing.

He could have lost no time in seeing about the matter, for when the two girls went to their cabin to change for dinner they found the woman in attendance. She seemed to know all there was to be known about waiting on ladies. "And do you know," Helen told them all at dinner, "she had a story about a certain colonel's wife whose hair was of the same colour as mine; and this it had been her duty to wash very frequently with the clear medicine contained in a peculiarly shaped bottle. She wanted to know if she could do the same for me!"

"Tut, tut," said Thomas Todd, laughing. All at the table joined him. All except Mr. Bidgood. He smiled, a momentary and pained elongation of the lips. That was all. For how could he be gay, how could he be convivial?

Others might laugh and talk and make merry. Others might quaff glasses of foaming champagne, unexpectedly produced by Colonel Tingle. They did not share his knowledge of the dark path spreading out ahead. And he sat apart, sad and self-contained, and when the first chance came slipped away to the engine-room.

But a short while ago on a cool, starry night like this a long chair on the poop would have been his haven, a big cigar his aid to contemplation. But now his troubled spirit knew no resting-place, his mental pain no anodyne. He paced the iron deck restlessly, like an animal at the Zoo, trying to find a way round the bristling difficulties which fenced him in. All and sundry on board, it appeared, could come and stir him up with a long pole, so to speak, if they wanted to. And Mr. Todd was the only one who ever brought him a bun.

Yes, the owner meant well, there was no doubt of it. He it was that had extended a protecting hand when the others had voiced their suspicions regarding the theft of the money. His, too, had been the forbearing tongue when the obstreperousness of Evans came up for discussion.

And how was he, Mr. Bidgood, returning all this kindness ? It would not bear thinking of. He tried to drown the thought in the roar and rattle of the machinery, but it remained with him. He dived through tunnels, through alley-ways, through bilges even, but could not escape it. His voice, as he addressed the firemen, could not out-shout it ; neither was the noise of his whistling able to overcome it.

When he came on deck again ten o'clock had struck. The second engineer was in the mess-room, moody but subdued. Tingle sat with him, and between them was a bottle. They made it plain that they did not wish for further company. He went forward, and coming out of the alley-way encountered the mate, who was standing in the shadow alone.

" Hello, Dixon," he said. " What are you doing around here ? "

" Watching," said the mate shortly. " You told me to watch, and I am doing it. They're up on the forecastle head," he added. " Have been for the last half-hour."

" What are they doing ? " Mr. Bidgood asked excitedly.

" How should I know ? " said Dixon with a sigh.

" But you ought to," Mr. Bidgood told him. " It's your duty, being mate of the ship, to keep a bright lookout."

" Has anything more been heard about Skinner's money ? " enquired the mate inconsequently.

" What do I know about that ? " returned Mr. Bidgood with a show of irritation. " Always 'arp, 'arp, 'arp about the thing. I don't believe he ever had any."

" Perhaps you don't know it, but I've had a loss too," said Dixon. " The eyepiece of my sextant disappeared somewhere or other a couple of days ago."

" You never told us."

"It may have been dropped while I was moving my cabin," said Dixon. "Skinner's sextant's laid up for repairs, so all we have to rely on is the old man's," he added.

"And what'll happen if that goes wrong?"

"Well, the ship might lose her way," replied Dixon gravely. "We fix our position by the sun, and if we haven't a sextant we can't do it."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Mr. Bidgood. Things were getting in a pretty condition. Every sort of end seemed to threaten them.

"There they are," said the mate, pointing with a trembling hand.

Mr. Bidgood, glancing along the finger, saw that two people had appeared on the forecastle head. The starlight barely enabled him to recognise them as Mary Amerton and the señor.

"They look very loving like," was his comment after a short examination.

The mate groaned slightly.

From the movements of the two figures it was plain that Mary wanted to return aft, and that the señor in a playful manner was trying to prevent her. She advanced to the ladder; he followed instantly. She made to descend; he caught her arm and gently pulled her back.

At this point Mr. Bidgood caught the mate's arm and pulled him back. "Can't you see they're only having a game?" he whispered.

Mary's clear laugh confirmed him.

The mate gave utterance to something that might have been a curse. He informed Mr. Bidgood what his action would have been under slightly different circumstances.

"All right," returned Mr. Bidgood. "Keep cool and give them a bit of rope. That's my advice to you."

He held him, and they watched the scene re-enacted.

This time the señor had to take Mary by the waist. It seemed to Mr. Bidgood, who was in a similar predicament, that the señor had the easier task.

"Let me go," whispered the mate fiercely.

"Keep cool," said Mr. Bidgood, holding on hard.

Fortunately, perhaps, for everyone, a second or so afterwards Helen Clatworthy emerged from the other alley-way and hurried forward.

"Mary," she called out sharply. She ran up on to the forecastle head and presently reappeared bringing the truant with her.

"She'll get it hot now," remarked Mr. Bidgood with the idea of being comforting. Although the mate never knew it, he was right.

Never before had Mary experienced the full force of Helen's tongue.

She defended herself with the simulated vigour of a person in the wrong.

"A most immodest thing to do," Helen told her. "With a stranger like that. Why, he's not even an Englishman."

"It was only a bit of fun," said Mary, hanging her head.

"It was not," cried Helen. "It was more than fun. It might have meant anything. Acting in the way you were doing!"

"How was I acting?" cried Mary, fiery red.

"Oh, as to that, I saw nothing," said Helen. "The Malay woman came and told me where you had gone. She said half the crew were watching you."

"I don't care."

"You do. Don't talk to me like that."

"Then where were you all the evening?" asked Mary in quick anger. "And where was Mr. Todd? Is no one allowed a little fun but you?"

"A little fun!" Helen exclaimed, flushing. She seemed at some loss for a reply.

"Yes," said Mary emphatically. "A little fun. You on the poop; I on the forecastle head."

"But never me on the forecastle head," retorted Helen. "Mary," she went on appealingly, "can't you see for yourself that Señor Canaba is the sort of man that a nice girl should have nothing to do with? Think of his appearance, think of the remarks he makes at table sometimes. How can you? I'm sorry you misname my friendship with Mr. Todd," she added.

"I'm sorry the pot called the kettle black," retorted Mary angrily. She turned her back and began to undress. They did not say "good-night."

When they awoke next morning the sun had risen quarter high, and away on the starboard beam there rose out of the smooth and colourless sea a range of high, rounded hills covered with a green forest, which at that distance looked thick and woolly, like a nigger's head.

"Two more days to Singapore," Mr. Bidgood told them. "This is what they call Acheen Head."

According to the chart it was Pulau Way, but then hydrographers are not infallible; indeed, as Mr. Bidgood pointed out, many a good ship has been lost through the navigator relying blindly on them, instead of trusting to his own eyesight. No, he did not want to have a look at any maps. The people who drew them most likely had never been out of London, whereas he had sailed these seas for nearly twenty years and could find his way home through them blindfold. The passengers looked at him respectfully.

"Ay, Miss Clatworthy," remarked Captain Porter. "He's good at finding his way home. Gets back to the ship after a long evening ashore when many a man would just roll over and lay in the gutter. Wonderful, I call it."

"Instinct, perhaps," said Colonel Tingle.

"No, sir, long practice, that's what it is," explained the captain.

Mr. Bidgood—they had begun painting again—grasped his sceptre and eyed his detractors indignantly. They walked away laughing.

"Drat 'em," he muttered.

"They're not worth paying attention to. Don't take any notice," advised Helen from the easel. A nice girl, he decided once again, after he had tired of selecting revenges against Captain Porter. He found himself talking to her many times during the next day or two, and was quite astonished at the extent of his information, and the ease with which he imparted it. There was no question about Penang. He and the hydrographers were in agreement as regards its situation. They passed it in the evening, a long black mountain reaching half up the sky, with a thick, uneven line of lights at the base of it. In the roads shone the lamps of many ships. A high-chested, double-funnelled liner, with a tier of portholes shining like miniature suns, glided by them, so close that they were able to hear her string band playing a waltz.

"Homeward bound," said Mr. Bidgood, handing Helen the night glasses. He mentioned the vessel's name.

"How do you know?" asked the owner, coming up.

"Saw it in last week's paper, sir," replied Mr. Bidgood.

"Well, I'll away now, and see what they are doing about the boilers."

"Dear me, wasn't he rather in a hurry?" said Thomas Todd, looking at her nervously.

"Perhaps he is. A nice man!" She gazed after him appreciatively. They talked on. She told him of a conversation she had had with the Malay woman, who had said that her husband was a jeweller, and that the picture was part of his stock-in-trade.

"Most extraordinary," was his comment.

"Do you know," she said looking at him, "of something else that has seemed a little extraordinary?"

" No ; what is it ? "

" This is the first time we have spoken to each other to-day."

He looked down. " Indeed, I have been busy with papers," he said stolidly. Not a protestation. She looked disappointed. He fidgeted uncomfortably and very soon went away.

The day after this he never sought her at all. She sat solitary, with an empty chair beside her, and sewed.

Mr. Bidgood, on his next visit, found her rather a dull companion. It was in vain that he pointed out the various vessels they encountered on their way down the Malacca Straits. She did not appear to be the least interested. The fact that B.I. steamers had white bands on their funnels, and P. & O. had not, was, so far as he could make out from her expression, a thing to be put aside as of no moment.

When he pointed to the low mangrove-fringed coast, and talked for a good twenty minutes on the subject of the pirates that haunted it, he caught her suppressing a yawn. She said they were very funny birds. It annoyed him to have to explain that he was talking of pirates, not parrots.

Even when they passed a small blue-funnelled ship within hail, and he exchanged a greeting with a stout gentleman aboard of it, she was not stirred. " That's Mr. MacNab, the chief," he told her, and wondered at her apathy.

As she must have been, he was surprised at the defection of Mr. Todd. It would be no good to keep a place warm for a man who never intended to occupy it. Was he doing right in remaining there? His action might easily be misunderstood, and he did not want to give another lever to Captain Porter.

He glanced at Helen, caught what he took to be an unhappy look, and decided to run the risk and stay.

" We'll look after you," he said pityingly, as he sat down

in the disused chair beside her. "Come, keep up your pecker, there's as good fish in the sea as any that haven't been hooked." Privately he felt glad for some reasons that things were turning out as they seemed to be. It was one complication the less, and who knew, perhaps later on she might be useful to throw to Evans as a sort of sop.

"I don't understand you," she said vacantly.

"Ah well," said Mr. Bidgood comfortingly, "I've been in the same predicament myself. But you'll be all right later on ; you'll get over it. Why," he added in a playful tone, but avoiding her eye, "what would you think of me for a fish ?"

She did not answer, and it struck him that, in his anxiety to cheer her up, he might have been too forward ; but looking up to see he found that her gaze was elsewhere. He glanced round and perceived the owner approaching.

"Isn't it time you went and looked at your engines ?" she asked.

"It is," said Mr. Bidgood, departing hastily.

But Thomas Todd passed the empty chair, swiftly and with averted gaze, as in childhood he used to pass the sweetshop, bearing his mother's change. Oh, the brandy balls ! Oh, the lollypops ! He had been fighting for hours. He wobbled still. "What do you mean by taking her on a risky voyage like this, after all her kindness too ?" conscience whispered. "Tell the captain to steer for Singapore. Go and sit in the chair, and give up struggling."

"I won't. I won't," muttered Thomas Todd running by. And he did not.

This victory carried the date of the evening before the *Susan Dale* passed through Rhio Bay.

An hour afterwards he was within an ace of revising it. He met Suliemina.

She appeared before him silently, as he sat on a stool in the dark outside his cabin.

"You are the Tuan who owns this ship?" she enquired abruptly.

"I am," replied Thomas Todd. He was startled by her sudden appearance.

"Perhaps the Tuan is not aware," she said in a low voice, bending over him, "that, in a day or so, all the whites in this ship will have trouble?"

"What do you say?" exclaimed Thomas Todd.

"The fat and red-whiskered one and his companions suborn the sailors," whispered Suliemina. "I have told no one. It is men's work. They speak to them now. Go and see."

She flitted away before he had time to collect his thoughts and detain her.

There was nothing to be seen when he went forward, although he hurried in an attempt at a surprise visit. All was quiet, and most of the sailors seemed asleep. But the night was dark, and, had anyone wished, they might, with difficulty, have slipped by him in the shadow.

It was an exciting experience, ending in agreeable disappointment. To the best of his recollection only once before—and that was on an occasion not very far back—had his heart beat so uncomfortably. He walked slowly aft, wondering what object the woman could have had in trying to alarm him. It was probably an obscure attempt at revenge. She wanted to retaliate on somebody, and this was her feeble way of doing it. It would be stupid to think that Tingle—his friend Ethelred—was what she said.

Outside the chart-room he met Captain Porter and, with a feeling of making a joke against himself, related his experience. The captain took his view. It was a case of

practical joking, and reminded him of a story, very funny but slightly coarse.

He told the story and began to laugh heartily, then suddenly stopped. For from somewhere below them came the agonised scream of a woman.

CHAPTER XVII

OWNER and captain, rushing helter-skelter along the half-lighted deck towards the sound, entered the dim alley-way just behind Helen and Mr. Bidgood. They found Mary sobbing violently, and the mate endeavouring to comfort her.

"Come out, you miserable skulker," shouted the mate, handing his charge over to Helen. He kicked the closed door opposite him with all his strength. Mr. Bidgood at once held him back.

"Good heavens! What's the matter, Mary?" gasped Helen, bending over the sobbing girl in great concern.

"I went into his cabin . . ." sob . . . "to look at the picture of his sister . . . and . . . ahoo! . . . ahoo! . . ." She buried her face on Helen's shoulder and burst into a fresh paroxysm of weeping.

Every man in the party felt inclined to kick the door.

"Yes, dear?" Helen said encouragingly.

"He tried . . . to kiss me, and I hit his face . . . and then . . . and then . . . I shrieked . . . and . . . ahoo . . . he opened the door, and said . . . ahoo . . . ahoo . . . ahoo . . . 'Life's too short to . . . to trouble about a little fool like you' . . . and he pushed me out."

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Helen in a shocked voice. "Come to the cabin." They made way as she hurried her off, and then gathered round the mate.

"She fell right into my arms," said he, continuing the

tale. "I had a smack at him, but I was too late and barked my knuckles on the door."

"The fellow ought to be ashamed of himself," remarked Captain Porter indignantly. "I can understand it if she was a stewardess or an Antwerp washerwoman. But one of my passengers! It's impertinence, that's what I call it."

"I call it by a worse name," said Thomas Todd severely.

"So do I, sir, indeed," cried Dixon with much vehemence.

"The chap wants a good dressing down."

"Knock him up again and see what he has to say," the captain ordered. Mr. Bidgood hastened to do so.

The door flew open sudden^{ly} and in the flood of lamp-light that burst forth they saw Canaba standing facing them, with something in his outstretched hand.

"Drop that!" shouted Captain Porter.

And before Mr. Bidgood had time to realise what "that" was, he saw the mate leap by him out of the darkness. There was a flash, a thud on the iron bulkhead, a loud report, a heavy bump, and the next thing, he was lying on the floor, with the mate and Canaba struggling together on top of him.

They both spoke an unwritten language, and both of them hit out wildly, to his considerable annoyance. Recovering as much as possible from his astonishment, he hit back, and was pleased to notice that his efforts had the effect of increasing the shouting of Canaba.

"Give it him, Bidgood," gasped the mate in his ear. He did so.

There was more shouting now, a confused pattering of feet, a jabbering of many tongues. People crowded round. He felt himself relieved first of the weight of the mate, then of that of the Spaniard. A lantern flashed in his face, making him blink his eyes, one of which already gave signs of closing permanently. A number of hands seized him, and stood him up on end against the bulkhead. The whole

place was full of acrid smoke. He could dimly discern Canaba's cabin full of the gesticulating foreigners. The mate was opposite him in the act of being patted on the back by the owner.

The next moment he was astonished to find his back being patted too.

"Splendid, Mr. Bidgood," said Thomas Todd enthusiastically. "Extraordinarily splendid! No one would have dreamt it of him, would they, captain?"

Captain Porter at once admitted that they would not.

"I don't call it splendid," said Tingle in his high voice from the cabin. He came out and stood looking threateningly from one to the other. "I can tell you this much," he went on angrily, fixing his eyes on Thomas Todd: "you'll regret to-night's business."

"I don't think so," returned Thomas Todd, bristling. "The man got what he deserved."

"And he'll give you what you deserve before we've done with you," retorted Tingle, raising his voice. "A nice thing if a man can't lay his hand on a woman in his cabin without having the inside knocked out of him."

"He can't on my ship, anyhow," declared Captain Porter shortly.

"No," said Tingle, "he can't, but other people can. There's one law for the owner and his favourites, and one for the crew. The owner can walk off with the second engineer's girl, the owner's favourite can steal the second mate's money. But let anyone else try on the same game, and there's this sort of a hullabaloo raised about it. You're a tyrant, sir, that's what you are."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Thomas Todd angrily.

"Don't you nonsense me, sir," screamed Tingle. "I won't stand it."

"Go for him, Tingle, the stuck-up brute," said Evans from the background.

"One of these days I'll have him hanged on the yard-arm," the colonel muttered, controlling himself with a visible effort. He turned sharply round and entered the cabin, banging the door behind him.

"Be off now to your duties," roared Captain Porter to Evans and the second mate. Perceiving a hint of disobedience, he produced Canaba's revolver and prodded them with it. Mr. Bidgood could not help admiring his superior at that moment. The man seemed as though he had been born doing this sort of thing; a fire-eater, and grown fat on it. He looked a size bigger and extremely fierce.

"By Christopher!" Mr. Bidgood heard him remark to the owner. "Some of these chaps are getting out of hand altogether. And that fellow of yours is the worst," he added, addressing Mr. Bidgood direct. "You get about your duties, too."

Mr. Bidgood at once discarded his attitude of admiration, and being unable to detect anything but approval of the captain in the owner's face, proceeded to obey orders.

The engine-room received him. When he peeped out of its doorway a minute after, the alley-way was deserted, and nothing but the smell of gunpowder remained to indicate the recent fray. The door of Canaba's cabin was still closed. Happening to pass it a moment later, he was able to hear the colonel's voice. The inexcusable thickness of the woodwork muffled it effectually. There was a key in the keyhole.

He came back, and sat just inside the engine-room door at the top of the ladder, ready for any emergency, including the sinking of the ship. It was a warm seat, more or less like a gridiron in fact, but a slight draught coming in from outside cooled his brain, and compensated for any discomfort.

And in such days of storm and stress, the brain, he

recognised, was, after all, the thing to consider. What though the seat burned him ! A healthy body would not be of much use to a man with a cut throat. And this, it seemed to him, was to be their fate if he did not exert his mental powers to their utmost.

To find a reason for his being on deck at midnight with a barrel of gunpowder beside him ! It ought to be very simple ; child's play to a man who had passed a Board of Trade examination. Why should he bring a barrel of anything into the night air ? Into the cold night air ? " Drat it ! " exclaimed Mr. Bidgood, with a sudden look of enormous happiness, slapping his knee.

He sprang up joyfully and stood upon the door-mat. He felt inclined to dance on it, perhaps would have done, had not he caught the sound of Canaba's door opening, and then of some people approaching along the alley-way.

" Three days more and you can slit all their gullets, for aught I care," Tingle was saying as they passed.

Mr. Bidgood looked out cautiously after them, and in an access of confidence put his finger to his nose, muttering a word or two of farewell. He muttered still as he slowly descended the ladder, deliberate as a well-fed spider on its web. Were words weapons Canaba had been already weltering. Already he had them in his toils, already a rope was spun for them. Had this idea about the barrels come to him before, his task would have been accomplished earlier. But better late than never. To-morrow night should see them under lock and key on a meagre allowance of bread and water. And then decent folk might sleep securely in their bunks, provided of course sensible precautions were taken against fire.

There was too much carelessness about this matter now. On deck the colonel and Canaba had begun to smoke cigarettes again. The sight of them at it made him shiver twenty times a day. Down in the stokehold, too, his

instructions with regard to the ashes seemed to have been forgotten. Only that morning he had caught a fireman heaving them up on deck half quenched, and in his just anger had slapped the man's face. The daring fellow had actually resented it. There seemed to be a spirit of unrest, almost of mutiny, about. Tasks that he had set the second engineer had not been done; floors were left unscrapped, bilges dirty, brass work unpolished. The whole place, to his experienced eye, wore an air of neglect.

"I'll have that chap, Evans, out of it when this is over," he thought to himself as he paced the platform. He began to consider how long it would take them to reach Port Arthur. Another week to Hong Kong, and then say a fortnight from there, always provided everything went right. It seemed to him that, in spite of the owner's confidence, there might be some danger of colliding with a floating mine. Well, if they did he could not be blamed, unless, indeed, the engines refused to go astern. They were lagging now and the steam had fallen. A nice predicament the ship would be in if they sulked like this with a Japanese cruiser in chase. This sort of thing must not be allowed.

He picked up a long, bright spanner, and, with it in his hand, went to the stokehold, and stood over the firemen as they worked.

Furnace doors banged, slices rattled and grew red-hot, shovels clanked, the coal rushed from the bunkers in uneven, shining streams, raising clouds of dust, and was fed unceasingly into the fires, which under his direction grew ever brighter and more insatiable.

He walked along the front of the boilers, bending down to examine every ashpit; he noted from the falling of cinders the strength of the inrush of air between the bars; he tapped the pressure gauge and found it good. Its indicator, stationary at first, began to ascend slowly. And

then, all at once, the whole stokehold was filled with a violent humming. The steam was awake again. When they heard the noise the firemen, dripping sweat, like trees after a shower, slackened their labours.

One of them had the audacity to sit down on an upturned pail. Mr. Bidgood immediately rushed forward and kicked the pail away. The man, uttering a fierce, inarticulate cry, dashed off, picked up a shovel and raised it threateningly. But Mr. Bidgood stood his ground, flourishing the spanner, and the man after a moment of indecision went on with his work. His face in the flickering gloom looked devilish ; Mr. Bidgood read mutiny in it, and, mindful of the captain's example, felt inclined to prod him with the spanner, but thought better of it, and, after a while, went back to the engine-room.

He was rather pleased with himself. Every day brought fresh evidence of his previously unsuspected store of valour. For a moment in the stokehold his heart had jumped to his mouth, but directly the fireman went on working again it began to resume its normal position, and was now beating much as usual. He felt he could face twenty men, let them be firemen, Tingles, or Canabas. As for handling machinery, well, look at the engines now !

They were running round as if afraid of him. The after main bearing was actually growing hot with exertion. He gave it oil and cooled it with a stream of water. The steam gauge needle pointed to one hundred and sixty pounds pressure per square inch. The clock shewed midnight. All was well.

With arms folded across his chest he walked smartly up and down, keeping step with the forward crank. The machinery clicked harmoniously, taking its time from him. The lamps burnt bright. Moving rods cast giant shadows. The oscillating water in the long gauge glasses told a tale of security. It was as though a regiment marched to victory

with him at the head of it. He walked like a general, but no general ever whistled as he did. At a quarter past midnight he reached his cabin and looked at himself in the glass. "What, both black, drat it!" he exclaimed, surprised. And rather sobered he went to bed.

Next morning he took the first opportunity of examining his features again, and was relieved to find that only one eye was damaged, the dark hue of the other being caused by coal dust. Soap and water had the effect of making his face seem lopsided, more reminiscent, perhaps, of a lively Saturday night than of the sort of fray that the wearer of the blue uniform might be expected to have engaged in. He was careful to cock his plumed hat well over the damaged eye before turning himself to the view of the ladies.

They, sitting alone and subdued on the poop, smiled faintly on him, or it may have been at him, he could not be certain. His appearance, he knew, was peculiar, even for a Spanish general, but the clothes were worn for them, the eye was earned in their battles, and surely now they would not turn on him and laugh. He went and leaned against the rail with his good side facing them, but at once Helen said petulantly that his uniform clashed with the colour of the sea, and he was constrained to move.

"You'll not be painting to-day," he remarked, noticing the absence of the easel.

"No, to-day, if you don't mind, Mr. Bidgood," she replied.

He noticed that she looked very pale, and that the eyes of the other were swollen, probably with much weeping.

"I'll get below and change," he said in accents which he tried to render dismal. No, they were not smiling at him. There was apparently hardly a smile in them that morning. It was strange how the moods of people altered. He felt in excellent spirits himself, ready for anything, a very

different creature from the one he had known a few days before.

And the scene around him was, as it were, a reflection of his frame of mind. No more did the *Susan Dale* plough through a boundless ocean, unguarded from the buffeting of wind and waves. The sea she now sailed on was a green and tender thing, smooth and safe as a duck-pond, with a beacon on every rock, a buoy on every shoal. Land hemmed her in on either side, rising gently as tufted hills, falling away again to olive-tinted groves of palms. Silver beaches glittered, the water gleamed, the sun shone. And far away over the quarter were visible the masts of many ships, and the chimneys and steeples of Singapore.

By sunset Mr. Bidgood expected to reach a haven of a somewhat similar nature. The thought buoyed him up, and the planning of every detail occupied him throughout the day. Time hung rather heavily. People spoke to him on generalities. The mate asked about his eye. There was an empty table at tiffin, but four o'clock witnessed the procession aft of Thomas Todd, Tingle, and Canaba, the offering of a formal and profuse apology to the ladies by the latter, and a cold reconciliation.

An hour or so later, when the short twilight had fallen, and the cool night breeze set in, Mr. Bidgood was observed to leave the poop, enter the lazarette, and appear again, carrying a small barrel, which he placed carefully on the hatch in full view of everybody.

Lethargy fled at the sight of him. All made a rush for the forward end of the poop. It was Captain Porter who first recovered the power of speech.

"What are you doing with that barrel?" he roared.

"Cooling it," replied Mr. Bidgood firmly. Producing a handkerchief he began to fan the small red barrel.

"Great Scott! The man's mad," said the captain to Thomas Todd in doubtful tones.

"Going on my usual rounds," continued Mr. Bidgood, descending from the hatch, and approaching the foot of the poop, "I happened to notice a smell of heat coming from the lazarette. I entered, as was my duty, and feeling all the barrels, I found that this one shewed signs of getting warm."

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Colonel Tingle, making a spring for the ladder. "Save yourselves!" He ran forward yelling out wildly in Spanish. Canaba, muttering something, bounded after him, and Captain Porter, with a haggard look on his face, ran towards a suspended bell, and began to ring it convulsively.

"Oh, what is it?" cried Mary in hysterical tones. She ran to Helen and clutched her round the waist.

Helen, white of face but calm, asked Thomas Todd the same question.

"There is no danger," he told her, looking extremely nervous. "Really, dear me. This—keep you head, I beg of you."

"Tell me what is in those barrels?" she demanded in suffocated tones.

But the noise prevented her from catching his reply. Loud shouts sounded forward, dominating the persistent clamour of the bell, and very soon to them were added the piercing shrieks of Mary, who began to run about the poop in uncontrolled fear. Helen pursued and held her.

"Be cool," she said, trying to put confidence into her voice. "It's nothing; it's nothing."

"Look at them then," Mary screamed. "See, they are coming!" She freed an arm and pointed forward. Down from the bridge deck and out of both alley-ways men were streaming, some carrying pails and axes, others dragging behind them coils of brown leatherhose. The pipe at the side of the poop was already oozing tiny streams of water at every cap and joint. And next instant the mate and

second mate tore aft, the latter with a long brass nozzle in his hand.

"Where is it, sir?" shouted the mate.

"Can't you see, blast it?" roared Captain Porter, ceasing his labours at the bell for an instant.

Thomas Todd ran nervously up to the two ladies. "I think—perhaps—better keep out of the way just now," he suggested. "Shall I take you to your cabin?" His voice was trembling and he looked white and anxious. Helen said they would go themselves. Plainly he could not be spared just then. She supported Mary down the ladder, and the two of them hurried forward hand in hand, giving a scared glance at Mr. Bidgood, who was again on the hatch fanning the barrel wildly, and staring about him with a bewildered air.

The success of his scheme had absolutely staggered the chief engineer. If ever there existed a man who was too successful, he was that man.

"What are you fanning that barrel for, you second-hand son of a paralysed pig?" yelled Captain Porter, noticing him. "If there's a spark you'll set it alight. Turn your hose on here," he added, addressing the mate and pointing.

The forceful stream of water caught Mr. Bidgood full in the face, drenching him from head to foot. In a dream he watched them play on the barrel until it stood, dripping, in a pool of water. In a dream he saw them return to the lazarette and drown it out again. He woke only when a man rushed forward with an axe, to break the glass of his cabin porthole. They understood him to say that this was entirely unnecessary.

"Stand aside," shouted Captain Porter, approaching in a hot fury.

"You don't know what you're doing!" He made to push him, but the owner interposed.

"Oh, please, captain. Don't be rude. He has saved the ship, you must remember," said he.

"We don't know about that yet," retorted Captain Porter snappishly.

"I've been inside myself—with Mr. Dixon," said Thomas Todd, pointing to the lazarette. "We've just come out. There's not the slightest sign of fire now."

Dixon confirmed the statement. They crowded round Mr. Bidgood, and shook him warmly by the hand.

His modesty amazed them. Fame had come to him and he appeared to shun it. He muttered something about slipping off and changing, as he felt cold, and made a motion to do so. But they held him back, crying out that he would soon be warm. An instant after he found himself one of a circle that held glasses and listened in some amazement, and in well controlled impatience, to a recital of his good qualities by the owner.

Meanwhile the sailors were coiling up the hose again, and sweeping down the decks. The gurgle of water as it fell before their swishing brooms, the clink of hammers, and the patter of naked feet, provided an uneven accompaniment to the owner's speech, and drowned more or less all other sounds.

The noise of excited conversation coming from the bridge deck was unheard by the circle of glass-holders, or if heard was allowed to pass unheeded. But at the crucial moment—just as Thomas Todd had ended his eulogy, and appeared ready to raise his glass to his lips—a loud outcry, the rattle of ropes drawn swiftly through wooden blocks, and a terrific splash, made every man turn his head.

"They've lowered a boat, sir," cried the mate. He rushed to the side. "Tingle and Canaba and a couple of Spaniards are in it. They're about swamped already."

"The mutton-headed footlers!" shouted Captain Porter.

"I shall have to stop the ship for them." He made rapidly towards the bridge, the two mates hard at his heels.

Thomas Todd ran to the poop to obtain a better view. The boat was already some fifty yards astern, wallowing helplessly on the edge of the ship's wake and rapidly receding. In the growing darkness he could just make out four figures standing up in her. They waved frantically. The sound of their shouting came to him very faintly.

The propeller stopped for an instant. The ceasing of the habit of its sound was almost painful. It revolved again, giving forth another note, and churned water about the stern. The half-sunken boat began to approach them.

Now that its occupants were on the road to safety, he felt almost as angry with them as Captain Porter seemed to have been.

It was at this moment that Mr. Bidgood approached delicately, touching his arm and saying, "Sir, a word with you."

"Eh!" said Thomas Todd, turning round.

"Putting things very short," whispered Mr. Bidgood hoarsely, "if you take my advice you won't let them come aboard again."

"What?" exclaimed Thomas Todd, facing him.

"They're a good riddance," said Mr. Bidgood solemnly.

"Or they would be if you'd let them. You were extra kind in the remarks you made about me this evening, Mr. Todd," he went on quietly, "not but what your remarks were undeserved, and I didn't always do my duty by the ship."

"Well, what do you wish to tell me?" asked Thomas Todd rather impatiently. The boat was getting very near, and all his eyes were for it.

"Do you see that boat?" asked Mr. Bidgood impressively, pointing with a huge forefinger. "Well, maybe, Mr. Todd, you will be surprised to hear that every man jack aboard of it is a cut-throat."

Thomas Todd stared at him hard for almost a minute, then smiled. "If I were you I should go and lie down for a bit, Mr. Bidgood," he said, "you've had rather a trying day."

"Cut-throats!" insisted Mr. Bidgood, disregarding the advice. "Cut-throats! Maybe, sir, you'd be surprised to hear that I'd saved the ship before now," he continued mysteriously, with his hand on the other's shoulder. "Maybe you would be surprised to know that when you were sleeping your chief engineer was awake and looking after your interests. Do you remember that other barrel that you found on deck? I was the man what put it there."

He drew himself up in apparent pride at the achievement. In his expression triumph and anxiety were strangely mingled.

"In the dead of night," he went on. "At the risk of my life, for I might have dropped it. Finding it hot where it was. Had to get it cool."

"Then why didn't you let us know?" demanded Thomas Todd sternly. He had forgotten all about the boat.

"I didn't wish to alarm you and the ladies," Mr. Bidgood told him.

The conjunction was unpalatable. "Well, go on."

"When I put the barrel on the deck," continued Mr. Bidgood, conveying his whisper to the other's ear by a trumpet formed with his hand, "I sat down beside it for a breather, and who should come trotting along but this chap Tingle and Canaba and also that fellow Bunn. Not seeing me sitting doggo there they talked . . . about cutting all our throats!" hissed Mr. Bidgood through his trumpet.

"What?" said Thomas Todd faintly.

"Aye did they," said Mr. Bidgood. "And about mutinying the crew, and Lord knows what all. . . ."

The engine had stopped again, and a sailor was coming

along the deck, obviously with a message for one of them. Thomas Todd stood for a moment gazing at the chief engineer. A faint hope rose within him.

"Perhaps you're joking?" he said.

"Joking, sir! Oh no, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Bidgood with awful intensity. The sailor was very near.

"Don't say a word about this to anyone," whispered Thomas Todd hurriedly. "Come to my cabin about nine to-night."

He left Mr. Bidgood, and walked forward.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN the surge of emotions, of thoughts and hesitations that beat about him, the owner clung with pathetic obstinacy to the intention of carrying out his enterprise.

That the ship harboured a gang of conspirators, ready when the moment came to make the decks a shambles, he fought hard to disbelieve, in spite of the evidence he had received. After all, what was the evidence? A vague story told by a disreputable serving woman, and a something Mr. Bidgood said he had overheard at midnight. The woman was clearly hysterical. Probably the man had been dreaming. He tried to convince himself that this was so, but with only partial success, for he could not forget the attitude of Tingle on the night of the robbery, the savagery of Canaba, the insolence of the second engineer. He remembered a hundred other and more trivial incidents pointing, he saw, in the same direction. He wished to discount them, but was unable to do so.

During the minute or so that he was walking forward, the opportunity of a lifetime, as the advertisements have it, occurred for him to show his mettle.

If Mr. Bidgood's tale were true, Mr. Bidgood's advice was good. Don't pull up the boat. Let Colonel Tingle and his friends row back to Singapore. It was merely a matter of a hundred miles or so, and the exercise would do them good.

He toyed painfully with the idea for a few seconds, and

then discarded it, only to wish he had not done so when the blocks of the davits began to creak. But when Tingle and Canaba stepped on deck again safely, nobody felt more pleased at their safety than he. He was the first to shake them by the hand. He was the one to restrain the bitterness of Captain Porter's tongue, and to bring them drinks. Were Mr. Bidgood's tale true, the cup he handed them, looking at the matter from a business point of view, should have been a poisoned one. At any rate he ought not to have allowed Colonel Tingle to empty it twice.

Thinking over the matter afterwards he felt rather disappointed with himself, but derived a grain of comfort from the fact that the others to all seeming had been as pleased as he. Indeed, their lucky escape seemed to have rehabilitated the two army officers to some extent in the eyes of Mary, or was it that the wetting that they had received had cleansed them ?

He did not know, but certainly Mary was as lively as ever at dinner that evening, with her " Oh, Señor Canaba ! " and " You don't mean it, Colonel Tingle ! " And her eyes seemed to seek theirs very freely.

Both men had a good deal to say, especially Colonel Tingle. It appeared that, at the first alarm of fire, he had suddenly recollected that a book in his cabin on " First Aid " had, at the end of it, some instructions about how to deal with spontaneous combustion, and he had run forward instantly to get this book. He had advised the señor to save himself, but that gentleman, putting as usual his country before everything, had gone off at once to secure some important state papers.

Both of them had intended to return without delay and, indeed, had begun to do so, when they perceived that Captain Porter had the fire well in hand, and that their services might be better employed elsewhere.

" Let us take every precaution for the safety of the

ladies,' this noble fellow cried to me," said Colonel Tingle, continuing his story. He pointed to Señor Canaba.

"You don't say so," exclaimed Mary for about the fifth time.

"I do, most certainly, my dear señorita," asseverated the colonel. "He is a great-hearted fellow, affectionate in his disposition, and quiet in his tastes; much misjudged and—if you will permit me on bended knee to plead for him—to whom much should be forgiven."

He looked round the table as if to estimate the effect of his words, caught Mr. Bidgood winking anxiously at the owner, and glared at him.

Mr. Bidgood in some confusion went on with his dinner.

"Oh, Señor Canaba!" said Mary rather woodenly.

The Spaniard bowed and smiled.

"'We will try the boats,' I cried back to him," said the colonel, continuing his story. "'We will try the boats, and see if their lowering apparatus is in good order, in case the ladies require to use them.' 'Excellent!' said he. Summoning our men, we rushed off to do so."

"Oh, I see it all now!" Mary cried. "It was for our sakes you risked a bath, Señor Canaba! How splendid!"

"We thought you were running away," explained Helen coldly.

"Running away, madam?" cried Colonel Tingle. "The idea is insulting! Mention such a thing in Brazil and the whole population would laugh at you! . . . But there is another thing I must tell you of, señorita," he continued, turning again to Mary. "When we came to examine the ropes holding our boat to the davits we found they looked rotten."

"No, they never did, sir," Captain Porter roared from the end of the table. "I examined them myself only a month ago," he told the owner earnestly.

"Rotten to the eyes of a landsman," said the colonel,

correcting himself. "Probably not to those of a British sailor. . . . Now, should we allow our brave fellows to get into the boat, and run the risk of being dashed to pieces against the ship's side through a rope breaking, or should we get in ourselves? It was then that my noble friend here said, 'We will get in ourselves.'"

"Excuse me, colonel," interrupted Canaba warmly. "It was your suggestion."

"You are too modest, my dear fellow," the colonel told him. "Yes, señorita, there sits the man who said those words. Look at him and learn to know him as he is."

"I do, colonel, I do," Mary murmured.

"How can a man with a face like that mean any harm?" the colonel asked her. "Shew me any Band of Hope that would not pass him in to its meetings free; that is all I ask of you."

He emptied his glass and, his memory evidently stimulated, ordered Bunn to bring another bottle of champagne from his cabin.

"It's a weird story," Captain Porter remarked, looking meaningly at the owner, "but as far as I can see it hangs together."

"Ay, it's a weird story," growled Mr. Bidgood. Winking heavily at Thomas Todd he rose and left the table. "A small job on the donkey boiler to be done," he explained in excuse for his retirement. "I shall be on deck again shortly."

The two girls very soon followed, and, at once, Tingle, with one of his interminable stories about female life in Brazil, chained the men to their chairs.

An hour elapsed before the owner came out from the hot and somewhat lurid atmosphere of the smoking-room.

It was a calm, warm night. Darkness held the sea and sky. In the absolute stillness the thud of the vessel's engines came upwards, muffled and regular. The ship

vibrated very faintly with the stress of them, but shewed no other sign of movement. Her lamps shone dimly as through a mist.

He walked slowly along, trying once again to piece together his impressions regarding the events of the day. In spite of his efforts an uneasy feeling was very predominant. He found himself unable to dismiss the thought of the perils these two helpless women, through his instrumentality, might have to undergo.

It was becoming increasingly plain to him now that he ought to have paid more attention to the warning the Malay woman had given him, and to have set his doubts at rest once and for all before the ship had left the waters of Singapore. Then he could, if necessary, have taken some steps to rid the ship of Tingle and his companions. It was too late to do so now, he argued. A feeling of irritation against Helen and Mary for being on board, which he had tried to foster, was now withered. In fact, he began to think that it had never been alive. They were the unfortunates, they were to be pitied ; it was they more than he who had just cause for complaint.

He wondered what opinion Helen would have of him if she knew ; not that he cared much one way or the other—of course not.

She was sitting half in the shadow outside her cabin door when he came up on to the bridge deck, and he saw her lay down the book she was reading and turn to look at him.

The pale light of the cabin lamp shone full on her yellow hair, and cast a soft illumination about her face. Against the background of the darkness he saw her as in a picture. She might have been posing for " Hard Times," " Even-tide," or one of a dozen other of his favourites.

It made him gulp. With an important interview ahead of him he ought, he knew, to have passed her with some remark executed on the run. It was really a futile

proceeding to slow up and dodge about, first on one leg, and then on another ; and besides, it was undignified. He hated it, but his feelings seemed to like this means of relieving themselves, and for the moment—well, he was, as he knew, under their orders. Not that he would stand any nonsense from anybody, although he might, if she pressed him, admit that certain reasons had compelled him to maintain a state of aloofness during the last day or two. If she demanded these reasons he would refuse to give them, or put her off. All that he wished was to drop back to somewhere near the old footing again. Friendly terms. No close relations. Close relations ! Tut, tut ! a stupid way of putting it—his nerves must be out of order—he felt jangly, wobbly. Did she notice anything ? Now he observed her it struck him that she was looking a shade perturbed.

"Dear me. A nice evening," he remarked at last, determined to be commonplace, and succeeding instantly.

"Hush ! " she said in a low voice, pointing to the open cabin door. She sat still for a moment ; he shewed no sign of going away, but stood there awkwardly ; she rose and, gathering up her skirts, tiptoed to the rail.

His pumps squeaked as he imitated her.

Mr. Bidgood, who was waiting for him in the shadow of the chart-room, looked round the corner at the sound, and drew back at once, sighing impatiently.

"Dilly-dallying, that's what I call it," he muttered, and began again to ruminate on the subject of slit gullets.

Thomas Todd did not call it anything. He stood hanging on to the rail with both hands, as if glad to get a grip of something solid.

She told him in a hushed voice that Mary was asleep, worn out with the excitement of the past two days. He found himself apologising.

"Oh, don't say that," she urged. "Of course it was not your fault."

"But I ought to have looked after you better," he persisted.

"Oh, I don't think you could. . . . You've been most kind."

"I haven't," he said with a vehemence that surprised himself. "I've been a brute—yes—dear me, a regular brute! If I could—if I could only—Miss Clatworthy—Helen—excuse me—I can't help saying it, but I—you must see how I feel!—I—I feel as though I want something to cling to!"

"Hush . . . hush . . ." said she. He made a nervous motion, abject, hesitating. She drew away a pace, and stood facing him, with her back against the rail.

Under the pale light from the cabin lamp her face seemed white and strangely calm. Her eyes held his with an intense, enquiring look. He found himself after a moment trying involuntarily to avoid their gaze.

"Well?" she said at last. Her calmness infected him. He felt as though he had broken a vase.

"Er—I'm sorry," he stumbled, "but I asked if you didn't understand my feelings and——"

"And?"

He looked at her hesitatingly.

"Good-night," said she with decision. Slipping past him, she walked swiftly across the deck, and entered her cabin.

He stood there gaping after her. After a while he tried to cheer himself up with the remark that he was well out of it.

Of course Mr. Bidgood knew nothing of the progress of events, but funnily enough he chose that moment to emerge from his dark hiding-place and walk heavily aft. A cold he had caught somewhere developed with startling

rapidity into a cough at the sight of the owner's back. He cleared his throat with careful violence. It was a long process, and by the time he had finished romance was dead.

"Ah, so you're there, Mr. Bidgood?" said Thomas Todd, turning. "That's a nasty cough of yours."

Mr. Bidgood said it was a small matter, probably seated in the stomach.

"I've heard consumptives cough exactly like that," the owner told him. "If I were you I should be careful and wrap up well in the evening. We don't want you on the sick list."

Mr. Bidgood hastened to reply. It appeared that all his family were remarkable for the strength of their lungs and constitutions generally. He, personally, in spite of his looks, felt he had the body of a man of twenty-five. He said that it was a fine thing to have a young body and an old brain, especially when a man had charge of a ship's machinery, and could not afford to make mistakes. When he married, he continued, as he supposed he should one day, if ever his salary was increased, his wife would never be able to cast in his teeth the fact that she had married an old man. As a matter of interest he might mention that his teeth at that moment were just as sound as they were on the day he was born, and——

"Really?" interrupted Thomas Todd in an irritated voice. "That's splendid. Now—er—what about this awful news you gave me?"

"As true as I'm standing on this deck," said Mr. Bidgood.

"I suppose you have witnesses?" asked Thomas Todd rather curtly.

The astonished Mr. Bidgood admitted that he had none except himself. "I was sitting in the dark near my barrel of powder," he explained.

"Yes, you've already told me about that," interrupted

Thomas Todd. "But it's not enough to go on. What you say you witnessed happened in the evening. Dear me! You might have been walking in your sleep."

Walking in his sleep! How little did the owner know of a chief engineer's duties, when he could for one moment imagine that one of their number, after a hard day, would walk in his sleep, or even dream of doing so. There seemed to be a pernicious idea aboard that, after all, the work he had to do on the ship amounted to nothing.

"No, I was not, sir," he replied respectfully but firmly. "I've no time for it. When I lie down I don't get up."

"But you wouldn't be aware of it if you did," the owner told him.

This of course Mr. Bidgood knew to be absurd. He felt that he was not getting a fair hearing. In the face of all this danger of slit gulleys the feeling angered him.

"Then what about what they said when they passed the engine-room door after trying to shoot Dixon?" he asked in an irritated whisper. "Tingle told Canaba that he could slit all of our gulleys if he waited a week. I heard him myself, that I did, drat him."

The attitude this owner seemed to be taking over the matter was incredible. What could have dictated it? Was it the fear of delaying the ship? Was it worry about letting people know what the nature of the cargo was? Was it funk? Was it ignorance of the danger he was running them all into? The man's next remark pointed to the latter.

"Dear me," said Thomas Todd. "I can hardly believe it . . . Well, if they try to cut ours, we must just try and cut theirs," he added, half to himself.

"You wouldn't have a chance," Mr. Bidgood assured him excitedly. "Give them another week and maybe they'll have got round all the crew. It wouldn't surprise me if they've got a hold of the second engineer already, and

some of the firemen. Did ye ever see Chinese firemen when their monkey's up? They'll have no mercy on man nor beast."

He thrust his face close to the owner's, and eyed him imploringly.

"They'll tie us up to posties," he continued in an effort to curdle his blood, "and cut slices off of us. As for those two poor lasses . . . well! Oh, drat it," he continued, bold with despair, "if you don't make a move, why, Mr. Todd—why, I'll have to make one myself."

"I am going to. Can't you see I'm going to? I only want to be sure," said Thomas Todd, weakly irritated.

"Sure!" exclaimed Mr. Bidgood, in accents of disdain. He waited, breathing heavily. "Put it before anyone!" he suggested.

"And are you really certain?"

"I am, sir," said Mr. Bidgood with great emphasis.

"Really, it's too terrible," said Thomas Todd, fidgeting with his glasses. "But, perhaps . . . Will you fetch that Malay woman? I should like to talk to her."

Impossible for him not to feel alarmed! All the evidence pointed to disaster, to the shipwreck of the enterprise on which his fortune was engaged. It was more than obstinacy that had made him hold out as long as possible. It was hope. "Perhaps affairs are not as bad as Mr. Bidgood imagines," he even now told himself. "Perhaps a cross-examination of the woman will reveal some misunderstanding or other."

But the reverse happened. Suliemina, seated on the cabin floor, told a tale which effectually dissipated every hope he had nourished.

"What has she brought her husband for?" he asked the gasping Mr. Bidgood.

"She would not come without him," explained that gentleman. "She said that it would not be proper."

"Tchat!" exclaimed Thomas Todd impatiently. He turned to the woman and asked, "Does he know anything about this?"

"Yes, Tuan," she replied. "They have asked him for his assistance, but he has not yet answered them."

She spoke to her husband in Malay. His reply was a lengthy one.

"He says they have offered him great rewards."

"Ask him about it, please, Mr. Bidgood," the owner requested.

"He says they went so far as to promise him three wives," translated Mr. Bidgood painfully. "He told them 'No.' One was enough . . . er. . . . What's 'e say about ears?" he asked the woman.

"The words are 'the tongue of a woman is longer than the ears of an ass, and might fitly belong to the same animal,'" she explained, eyeing her husband angrily.

The little wizened Malay grinned at her from his corner, and, after adjusting his turban, proceeded to further speech.

"All the firemen (that's just what I said)," continued Mr. Bidgood, translating. "Some of the sailors . . . the second engineer . . . the second mate (lummie, even Skinner!) . . . they are to wait till we sight land, and then. . . . What's that he says about a dog?"

"He says," replied the woman, "'on that day you will be in the position of a fat flea hiding under a hair on the tail of an irritated dog.'"

"Ho! Does 'e!" exclaimed Mr. Bidgood angrily. "And he'll be like——"

"We must see the captain at once," said Thomas Todd in a very troubled voice. "We mustn't waste any more time. No, indeed. Tell these people to go, Mr. Bidgood, and come with me."

The astonishment of Captain Porter, when the two of them sat down solemnly in the chart-room and told him

the terrible news, had to be relieved by means of a bottle. Indignation tinted his speech to an extent which Thomas Todd would hardly have believed possible.

"And what shall we do, captain?" he asked anxiously.

"Do, sir?" exclaimed Captain Porter, furious. "I'll have the whole job lot of them in irons before six o'clock to-morrow morning! As for the second engineer and firemen, I'm not surprised at anything they are up to," he continued, glaring at Mr. Bidgood. "Where there's no discipline you may expect insubordination. But we won't go into that now. The point is that you can't arrest anyone when there's nobody to arrest them with. It seems to me that nearly everybody on board wants arresting; and when they are arrested who's going to do the work?"

"Couldn't we turn the ship back?" asked Thomas Todd hesitatingly.

"They'd smell a rat at once," pointed out the captain. "No, we must run for some port, say Labuan, and slip into it at night, before they know where they are. We've got about a week's grace, according to what Bidgood says he heard them say."

That was the only reference either of them made to the chief engineer. As usual, after doing all the work, he was left right out of it, and he could have given them one or two good ideas, too. He felt like a dummy as he sat there listening to their argument about ways and means. So far as he could make out the captain was talking nonsense, but the owner seemed pleased enough with it, so why should he interfere? He was the chief engineer, a man to be called in only when they couldn't keep him out. As for the plan—well, it might do. It wasn't his place to criticise. It appeared that the saloon was to be provisioned, that arms were to be carried thither, and the compass altered so that the change of course should not arouse suspicion; that it was intended to reach Labuan at night. Everything settled

without asking him once what he thought about it ! Who was it discovered the plot, he should like to know—he or Captain Porter ?

“ Now then, Bidgood,” said the captain suddenly. “ There’s no time like the present. Come and help us to carry a few things.”

Ah, they could not do without him altogether !

CHAPTER XIX

"**B**UT wait a minute, captain," said Thomas Todd, raising a hand. "Let us go about the business systematically. It's a terrible business; dear me, yes! But I'm sure that with a little system——"

"No doubt, sir," said Captain Porter.

"We ought each to make a list of what we want, and then compare them," went on Thomas Todd. "I'm sure it would be useful. Just suppose now, for instance—if we did happen to have to stay in the saloon owing to the activity of these wretched people, and I had forgotten—er—a toothbrush, say! I should feel most uncomfortable! A little forethought may save us a *contretemps*. You see what I mean, Mr. Bidgood?"

"Of course, sir; it wouldn't do to lose that," said Mr. Bidgood. He noticed the owner's stare. "It's a fine plan," he added hastily. He would have liked to have been a little clearer about the meaning of "*contretemps*," but forbore a question. "Some sort of gin, like 'Old Tom,' no doubt," he muttered. "I didn't know Mr. Todd had any." The owner appeared in a new light. "He can't have much, anyway," thought Mr. Bidgood. "He only brought a handbag with him when he came aboard." It just shewed the foolishness of his hesitation a day or so before, about having his cabin searched for the second mate's money because of the number of bottles there. "You never can tell with these quiet ones," he thought, surveying

the spare figure opposite him, now busy with pencil and paper. "I wonder what Porter's puttin' down," he continued to himself, looking round at the captain. It was time he himself began. He bent his head and scratched it. For some fifteen minutes silence reigned in the chart-room. Mr. Bidgood during that time raised his head more than once and looked enquiringly at Captain Porter, sucking his pencil the while.

"Er—I think that's all that occurs to me just now," said Thomas Todd, sitting up. "What a long list! Is yours long, captain?"

The captain had a long list also. Mr. Bidgood's proved shorter.

"Then suppose you read yours first, Mr. Bidgood," suggested the owner, "and we can see if we've left anything out."

Mr. Bidgood therefore read:

"Sticking-plaster, bandages, zinc ointment, pair of pliers for extracting bullets, one hammer, two chisels, one half round file, half-dozen bottles Country Tom Gin (if available), three dozen bottles beer (for use of captain and passengers), one corkscrew."

"And where's your ammunition and your food?" asked Captain Porter in angry sarcasm. Mr. Bidgood scratched his head.

"I've got that down," said Thomas Todd. "But nothing on Mr. Bidgood's list except—let me see—yes, the sticking-plaster."

The chief engineer flung a look of triumph at Captain Porter.

"You and your gin!" hissed the captain jealously. It was a wearing business.

The next two hours or so, when they walked the decks in stockinged soles, carrying the stores for a siege to the saloon, were wearing₂ also.

At the end Mr. Bidgood sat down, completely worn out. So were his socks. Not that he had anything to complain about ; the owner and the captain had done their share of the work ; no doubt if the soles of their feet were examined it would be found that they also had worn their socks to shreds.

As a matter of fact it was now apparent that Mr. Todd had. He was wearing light lavender ones, and there were holes in the soles as big as five-shilling pieces. This was plain to be seen when he put his feet up for a moment on the saloon settee. They stared Mr. Bidgood in the face, and, like a bloodstain on the floor or a bullet hole through a looking-glass, served as a potent reminder of tragedy.

But for these, and the slightly rumpled appearance of the three men, there was nothing about the saloon to suggest that anything out of the ordinary had been happening. Nobody, for instance, would have guessed that inside the settee, on which the perspiring Mr. Bidgood was calmly seated, were now hidden six rifles, two carving knives, a hay fork, a hatchet, hammer, chisels, rope, three dozen bottles of beer, and two hundred rounds of ammunition ; that a tin despatch box, holding most of Captain Porter's portable property, was now secreted somewhere immediately under that gentleman, and that Thomas Todd's portmanteau, containing, so far as Mr. Bidgood knew, the gin, was locked away in the cupboard opposite.

"A fortnight's provisions in the pantry," said the captain. "We ought to be able to hold out."

"And the fresh water tank next door, I understand," added Thomas Todd, with as much enthusiasm as he felt capable of at the moment.

"Ay, ay, sir, if the worst comes to the worst I can soon cut a hole in that with my hammer and chisel," said Mr. Bidgood in a depressed way.

"The ladies will need it for washing," pointed out the

captain with the air of a man who knew what he was talking about. "They'll have to use a pail," he added.

"Dear bless me!" exclaimed Thomas Todd. "I had forgotten them for the moment. How—oh, isn't it dreadful to think they're mixed up in this bl—er—gory business? Dear me. And to have to ask Miss Clatworthy to wash in a pail. I don't think she'd like it at all."

"I don't mind letting them use the hand basin in my cabin, sir, if that would be of any service to you," Mr. Bidgood offered. "They can use my towel, too, if they want," he added generously.

"Why not let them have Bidgood's cabin altogether?" suggested Captain Porter. "Put the ladies in, turn Bidgood out, and have the gunpowder moved into their cabin and the chart-room. If there are any bullets flying about we don't want explosives near us."

The man seemed full of ideas.

"And where am I to sleep?" asked Mr. Bidgood.

"On the saloon settee."

"Oh!" said Mr. Bidgood with no enthusiasm.

"To a strong man like you a little roughing it won't come amiss," said the owner.

"No, sir, not at all," said Mr. Bidgood, mollified. After all, although it might be a bad move for him personally, it seemed to him a good one so far as the majority were concerned. There was some discomfort in store for most of them, but a wakeful night or so was better than being put to sleep for ever.

"Nobody shall say that I'm not willing to do my little bit," said he to the owner. In his private mind he was now finding it difficult to associate Colonel Tingle with anything very bloody.

The cabin lamp began to run out of oil. The faint light it gave shewed the faces of his two superiors, grim, and grave, and yellow.

Then the captain said, suddenly, "There's nothing more to be done, now, Mr. Todd, than to tell the mate, and put those magnets in the compass."

"No . . . no. I don't really think there is," said Thomas Todd, looking at his list again.

Mr. Bidgood, stealing forward, felt almost a thrill of satisfaction. He had already given Dixon his opinion of their passengers, and been laughed at. There would not be much laugh now.

The night had settled inky black. The deck was wet with a heavy dew that soaked through the remains of his socks and chilled his feet. He and the captain knew the way about, but the owner stumbled once and fell heavily.

"Thank you, thank you, my dear Mr. Bidgood," he whispered as the chief engineer hurried to assist him. My dear Mr. Bidgood !

"What are you looking so pleased about ? " asked the captain suspiciously when they were in the chart-room again.

Mr. Bidgood gave him no reply.

"Anyone would think that you had just received a Christmas present," remarked the captain. He unlocked a cupboard, and produced what seemed to be three crayon pencils painted red and black.

"These will about do the trick," he told the owner, holding one up. "They're magnets. Every ship carries them for compass adjustment. I shall put them in the bottom of the standard—there are three holes ready. I'll stake my oath that Skinner won't know that we've set another course."

"You'll tell the mate ? " asked Thomas Todd. "Shall I come up with you ? No ? Very well. Then, really, do you know, I feel quite tired ; I shall go to bed. Good-night to you both."

"Good-night, sir," replied Mr. Bidgood. He also left the chart-room, and, shoes in hand, stole to his cabin.

It must have been about three o'clock in the morning before he rolled into his bunk ; half past, perhaps, before the remedy of closing his eyes and counting empty beer bottles, that were being passed to him over a hedge, had its effect.

But when he did get to sleep, he, as usual, got to sleep well. The clatter of breakfast in the saloon next door failed to awaken him.

He missed a good deal through being away from the saloon that morning. On the other hand his absence may have spared him pain. Conversation went much as follows :

" You want us to move from our nice cabin, Captain Porter, just as we have made it so comfortable ? How can you be so cruel ? " cried Mary from her corner when she heard the news.

" Well, miss," answered the captain, sitting at the end of the table like a Buddha, " for that you must put the blame on Colonel Tingle, here."

The colonel hastened to exhibit his astonishment.

" In what manner has my friend interfered with this matter of the cabin of the ladies ? " demanded Canaba politely.

" Owing to his representations to Mr. Todd and me about the dangers of spontaneous combustion," replied Captain Porter, gazing steadily at the wall opposite, " we have decided to store the pickled beef in the forward cabins."

Colonel Tingle emitted a high note of surprise.

" So as one of us can always have his eye on it," explained Captain Porter.

Nobody could have failed to mark the colonel's look of consternation. But a low remark in Spanish by Canaba had the effect of pulling him together.

" Aha ! " he remarked, looking sharply round the table. " A very good idea."

"Gases might form inside the barrels from the beef, and explode," explained the captain further. "I knew of a similar case happening in Brazil. Twenty men killed."

"I must have been up in the Andes at the time," said Colonel Tingle. There was a defiant note in his voice.

"But the empress herself was present at the funeral!" said Mary. "I can recollect seeing about it in the papers. I'm fairly certain."

The colonel, backed by the strained silence of the others, sat for several seconds obviously struggling with a dishevelled memory. "I think I do remember the occasion," he announced at last. "In fact, I have a hazy recollection of sending a wreath myself. A fearful occurrence!"

"Yes," agreed Thomas Todd. "We mustn't have such a thing happen here; not on any account. Ah! What is that noise? Have they started moving the barrels?"

But the noise he heard was merely Mr. Bidgood, next door, getting out of bed and beginning to dress.

The colonel finished his breakfast in silence, and, contrary to his custom, left the table at once.

"He seems a little put out about something this morning," suggested Helen enquiringly, pointing after him.

"Maybe he's jealous about you getting the chief engineer's cabin," observed Captain Porter.

"I hear it's the coolest cabin in the ship," said Thomas Todd. "Captain Porter will have it thoroughly rearranged to suit you."

"And washed out from floor to ceiling. I expect it will be the better of it," added the captain. This was the remark that might have pained Mr. Bidgood.

But he did not hear it. The walls were thick, and, in any case, he was thinking of other things. Of how grey hairs were beginning to be noticeable in his beard; of what he would look like in twenty years' time, if he were

alive in twenty years' time. But a week, nay, even a day, might see the end.

Habit led him to don the blue uniform. He found Tingle and Canaba in possession of the poop. They looked daggers at him, as he stepped briskly to and fro, enjoying the morning air. He did his best to give them as good as they gave, but the recollection that he was wearing Tingle's suit hampered his efforts.

"You would be well advised to take my uniform off," Tingle told him irritably. "Every movement you make bags the knees of the trousers. . . . There will be no painting to-day."

"And why will there be no painting?" asked Mr. Bidgood, pausing in his walk.

"Because . . . because that bloated blockhead of a captain is turning the ship upside down and endangering the lives of everyone just to satisfy a whim," said Tingle angrily. "What is he doing it for, I should like to know?"

Mr. Bidgood, gazing solemnly straight ahead, raised a podgy forefinger and tapped the side of his nose there. He then resumed his walk.

"What do you do that for?" demanded Tingle, pursuing him. But Mr. Bidgood disdained reply.

Later on, the deck was alive with men carrying the small red barrels to the chart-room; brown, bare-footed men, wearing scanty drapery. A white-clad Chinaman, armed with a bundle of the ladies' belongings, threaded his way aft through them. It was like a complicated figure in a dance. And the sun, necessary to the artist, but discouraging to the worker, flooded the scene with heat and light.

Captain Porter and the mate hurried backwards and forwards, looking full of business. Mr. Bidgood did not mind that; it was natural to them. What he did object to was the presence of the second engineer, Tingle, and Canaba on the hatch, their nudgings, their whisperings, their

laughter when his back was turned. He had a sudden inspiration, and pausing in front of them addressed the second engineer.

"You haven't much to do, sitting there, taking your water off of people," he said.

"It's my time off," returned Evans insolently. "And what's more, I'm going to have my afternoons as well. You've no business to come a trip like this short of a third engineer."

"Ho! Haven't I?" said Mr. Bidgood. He advanced and eyed him steadily. "And you've no business to keep barrels of pickled beef hid in the waste locker," he remarked in low, distinct tones.

"What? There isn't!" exclaimed the second, jumping off the hatch. Tingle and Canaba gazed at him in horror.

"Mebbe there's one, mebbe there's two," continued Mr. Bidgood. "You had best bring them up at once, now you've a chance, and I won't say anything." He retired to a corner, and presently had the satisfaction of seeing the second leave the others and slink into the engine-room.

That was all he saw, but going below himself after dinner he examined the waste locker, and found the barrel had vanished. He had an attack of pride at the discovery. There were other heads on board beside those of Captain Porter and the owner.

Generally speaking the engine-room was looking very satisfactory, in spite of the inattention of the second engineer. Of what account were these underlings after all? A good chief engineer was the necessity, and while he, Mr. Bidgood, was about, people would have no difficulty in laying their hands on one. He paced the platform feeling like a long-felt want. The engines were turning at a slower rate than usual, and the engine-room was baking hot. The Fahrenheit thermometer registered one hundred and thirty degrees.

But, of course, heat was nothing to a good chief engineer, so long as there was plenty of efficiency on tap. That was his province. Later on in the watch, when he came to look closely into things, he could not help noticing one or two little evidences of slackness, unpainted bulkheads, uncleaned oil boxes, unswept floors. And then, going round to the shaft tunnel, his eye, perhaps sharpened by danger, was caught by the screw of the water-tight door. "Evans again," muttered he, staring. "Drat the fellow! If there was a leak in the tunnel and we had to shut the door, it's that rusty we couldn't do it."

He slobbered the screw with oil, and sent a fireman up to the top platform to turn the wheel that closed the door. The man had a hard task at first, but, after a minute or so, he broke down the adhesions of rust, and the screw ran freely through its nut. The heavy iron door—it was like that of a sluice—slowly descended.

"If anyone was inside there now, and the ship sunk, his number would be up," muttered Mr. Bidgood. He shouted to the fireman and the door began slowly to rise again.

Visions of men imprisoned behind it flitted through Mr. Bidgood's brain. He could imagine Captain Porter there praying to be let out. He could imagine——

Suddenly he turned on his heel, and, making his way to the platform, began to pace it furiously.

That evening the weather had begun to change. Huge black clouds blotted the sky, moving from west to east majestically like battleships. Heavy showers marked their passage. The sea roared and whitened as these rainbursts fled across it. The scuppers were brooks. Awnings dripped. The air had become comparatively cool.

"Are we never to have a moon, Mr. Dixon?" asked Mary complainingly, stopping the mate in his lonely promenade.

He replied that a week must elapse before there would be one worth mentioning.

"How horrid . . . I wonder where the rest of us are?"

Helen and the owner stood talking at one end of the poop; Tingle and the captain at the other.

Mary gave a shrug. "Do help me with my wrap," she said almost petulantly.

The mate obeyed, with hands that trembled.

They drifted towards the rail. "I wanted to tell you," she said; "when I moved my things from your cabin, I took your mother's photograph, and I've hung it up in the new cabin. Do you mind?"

"No," said the mate. "I'm glad."

"She seemed to want me to take her," went on Mary.

"She seemed to look at me and say, 'Now then, my young friend, you'll be all the better for somebody to look after you.'"

"Yes, she'd do that," said the mate, looking a shade proud at the instant. "Not that anyone thinks you want looking after," he added, as if something struck him.

"We all make slips," said Mary in a soft voice. She flushed in the darkness. For nearly a minute they were silent.

"The foreigners are funny people," began the mate, as if following up a train of thought. "A sailor meets many of them."

"And how do you like the sea?" asked she, shivering.

"It's a lonely life——" he began lugubriously.

"With a sweetheart in every port, they say!" she laughed.

"The man who said that told an untruth," he assured her with some vehemence. "All sailors want to marry and settle down, but they can't. . . . That's where the misery of a sailor's life comes in," he added.

She looked at him with what seemed to be a dawning interest. His face was sad.

"You must save, and save, and save," she told him, when she had finished her examination. She gazed around her for a few moments. "And is there anyone yet?" she asked indifferently.

"I've a little girl in my eye——" confessed the mate with much coyness.

"The captain and Colonel Tingle have just gone down the ladder," she remarked, interrupting him. She was gazing now at something going on behind him. "I beg your pardon; what did you say you had in your eye?" she asked after a time.

"Oh, nothing. It doesn't matter," he returned in disappointed tones.

There was a long silence. He said at length that it was time for him to go.

"Wait a minute," she exclaimed, clutching his arm. She seemed intensely interested. "Don't move! Yes, do! . . . Look!"

The mate turned, and saw the owner in the act of taking Helen Clatworthy's hand. "I do hope they'll be happy," Mary whispered. "We mustn't stay here. I think I shall go to bed."

He followed her quietly down the ladder to the door of Mr. Bidgood's cabin, and long after she had said good-night he hung about in the shadow beside the door, seemingly unable to tear himself away.

And she within, looking up for a moment as she plaited her hair for the night, said, "Would you think it very rude of me, Mrs. Dixon, if I looked you in the face again?" She was blushing.

"Of course it's not for me to say," she whispered after a while. "I do try hard . . . but . . . but . . . he's so . . . stupid . . . sometimes. . . . Good-night."

Outside the clouds had passed, and there was left a dome of darkest indigo, hung with a multitude of stars. A deep

silence reigned, broken only by the muffled beat of the engines. On nights such as this, lovers stand beneath windows in Spanish cities, bachelors sigh, and Hodge becomes Lothario.

And the mate kept watch outside her cabin. It was perhaps lucky he did so, for about eleven o'clock Mr. Bidgood walked smartly along the deck and attempted to enter.

"Hi ! Where are you going ? " said the mate.

"Drat it ! I forgot we'd been shifted ! " exclaimed Mr. Bidgood. "My head's so full of something else. . . . Have you seen Mr. Todd anywhere ? "

"He's up there," replied the mate, pointing to the poop. Mr. Bidgood made to depart in the direction indicated.

The mate detained him. "You can't go up there," he said, and told him why.

"Drat this dilly-dallying ! " exclaimed Mr. Bidgood, turning as he walked off. "I don't suppose he'll get away for an hour yet."

As a matter of fact the owner joined him five minutes after. And very soon the pair of them were on their way to seek an interview with Captain Porter.

CHAPTER XX

ON board the *Susan Dale* that night wakeful eyes stared into the darkness ; and forms, young and slender, stout and old, turning restlessly in search of slumber, revealed cambric nightgowns trimmed with blue ribbon, pyjamas of fancy hue, and in one case a red flannel singlet.

The stout gentleman who wore this latter garment lay on a settee in the saloon, fighting with a headiness which the approval of a scheme of his had induced, and pondering the sadness that had come over Mr. Todd. " Can this be love ? " he asked himself.

Love, he knew, might be diagnosed by many symptoms ; when a man kissed a girl, for instance, that was love ; when a man called for drinks all round, his action might often be traced to the beneficent working of the tender passion.

But why the owner's gloom, his forced smile, his worried look ? Surely she had not refused him ? A commonsense interpretation of the mate's story would not admit of that solution.

The news of their engagement had not yet been communicated to him officially, nor had Captain Porter heard about it, or he would scarcely have told Mr. Todd, during the interview earlier on in the evening, that the two ladies were the biggest nuisances that had ever sat on the poop of the *Susan Dale*. But all the same the engagement existed, and those in the know were, if at all wise, forming

the habit of considering Miss Clatworthy as the future Mrs. Todd.

He had defended her warmly against the captain's aspersions, saying that he considered her a very proper young woman, and that the man would be fortunate who got her, as she was all head and no tongue.

"Then you would be in favour of letting them into our secret?" the owner had asked him, with an appearance of eagerness.

"I think Miss Amerton is too talkative for that, sir," Captain Porter had put in. "She'd blab it in five minutes. I know the sort."

"But Miss Clatworthy?" the owner had asked anxiously.

"Tell one, tell the lot," had been Captain Porter's reply. "I'm a married man, and ought to know." Of course it had been useless to argue against this.

Mr. Todd had looked disappointed, Mr. Bidgood recollected. It was early days for that. Maybe he wanted to tell her everything. Maybe he felt sorry he had told her anything. It was difficult to say what was the matter, but the shoe pinched somewhere.

"They'd scream the blessed masts down if they knew what we know," the married man had gone on. "My sextant's been smashed up now by one of these devils," he had added. "I caught that fellow Bunn hanging about the bridge. He was looking at the compass. I just about put my boot through him."

A terrible state of affairs, truly, had there not been a brain available. He recalled a dozen times the owner's eager welcome of his plan, the objections raised by the captain, and their overruling of them, the final talking over every detail in that closed and stuffy cabin.

To-morrow should complete his triumph. Disaster should be averted by a thrust of his finger. With another

finger he would beckon happiness. They might ask him to be a godfather! Why not?

With such thoughts as these running through his brain he found sleep difficult. In fact he may be said to have scarcely slept at all. The dawn saw him wandering round the deck, wearing his red singlet, and trousers of a hue that rendered competition vain.

According to arrangement he retired before breakfast to the owner's cabin, and put on the blue uniform.

"Up already?" exclaimed Mary, when he appeared at the table. The others made remarks of a similar nature.

"The early bird, miss," he said jocularly. It was important that morning to create an atmosphere of happiness and trust about the party.

Colonel Tingle, possibly without intention, hampered his efforts at once. He wanted to know if cockatoos were early birds.

"Why do you mention cockatoos?" asked Mr. Bidgood.

"Oh, nothing," replied the colonel. "Merely a vague association of ideas."

"But it wouldn't be any use for them to get up early," pointed out Mary. "With beaks like theirs they couldn't possibly catch worms."

"They might grab them with their claws," Helen pointed out.

"Some birds I've read of," pursued the colonel, "sea birds especially, catch worms by staying up late at night. There was one about the ship yesterday. Did you see it?"

"No," Helen replied shortly. Mr. Bidgood saw that for some reason or other she was discomposed. The atmosphere was getting wrong.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared. "Very good! Birds catching worms aboard a ship. Very good!"

"We have a bird in Brazil," went on Tingle, "called the macaw, whose plumage is of about the same bright blue

as the uniform the chief engineer is wearing, and whose nose is—I mean whose beak is red. It's a noisy, stupid, gluttonous bird."

"Ha, ha, ha! Very good!" roared Captain Porter.

Mr. Bidgood, who was in the act of helping himself to more bacon, changed his mind, and waved the dish away.

Impossible to create the right atmosphere in the face of a poisonous tongue like that!

Mary interposed with a remark about the vultures that haunted the Andes, and were glad, so she had heard, to get anything to eat at all.

The colonel said viciously that he was certain they would not be able to tackle the food on the *Susan Dale*.

"You ought to know," Mary retorted quietly.

It was a quiet, depressing meal. Tingle and Canaba seemed to think that Captain Porter was the only person at table worth talking to.

The three of them were the first to leave. Mary said she thought everyone was horrid that morning.

"It must be something in the atmosphere," remarked Helen, looking quickly at Thomas Todd. His eyes fell as they met hers.

"We may as well get on with our painting, Mr. Bidgood," she said after a while in constrained tones.

She got up at once and left the table. Mr. Bidgood noticed the owner make an eager movement, as though to follow her, and then sit down again, his head resting on his hand.

"Never mind, sir," he ventured to remark at length. "Your troubles will soon be over."

"What! . . . Oh! . . . Yes."

"All you have to do is to keep your 'ead," said Mr. Bidgood after another awkward silence. "I'll manage the rest."

He left him sitting, and went on to the poop, where he found Helen with her easel awaiting him.

At her command he posed with his face towards the vessel's stern.

One bell struck.

Before him, straight as an arrow, stretched the wake, a white scar on a blue and lazy sea. A strange looking gull was following the ship, effortlessly to all appearance, rising and falling in the manner of a boy's kite. And low down towards the left there wheeled in absolute unison a flock of long-winged birds, whose under-plumage flashed when, in their convolutions, they turned and caught the sun.

These birds indicated the near presence of land, but of what land he did not know for certain. It might be Borneo; the ship had passed the Natuna Islands a day ago. The alteration in the compass was evidently having its effect.

If this plan of his came off the necessity for steering so far to the eastward would have ceased, unless the captain still adhered to his original intention of landing all passengers at Labuan. He trusted no muddle would be made of the details. It was unfortunate that he should have to stand there like a dummy, with his back towards everything, at such a time.

Miss Clatworthy, absorbed in her work, gave him no chance to turn. He had to rely on his ears, and they did not tell him much. Merely that the engines revolved as usual; that Mary was somewhere behind him with a novel—she read extracts from it occasionally. Now and then he heard distant footsteps. Once he thought they sounded as if approaching. Immediately his heart began to beat heavily. But they died away.

Two bells struck.

The ladder creaked. "Here they are now," he muttered, and braced himself for the adventure. Miss Clatworthy

looked up for a moment, flushed, and at once became industrious again. It was only Mr. Todd. Mr. Bidgood heard him make a remark to Mary.

"If they don't hurry up," he thought, "Evans will be gone."

And then footsteps sounded again. This time, unmistakably, people were coming aft. Again he braced himself.

"Keep still, Mr. Bidgood, please," Helen said. "Just a moment more." They were coming up the ladder.

"Don't turn," cried Helen. "It's only Captain Porter."

"Can I speak to him, miss, or is he too busy?" asked the captain jovially. "We're just going to take a run down and see the engines, Bidgood," he continued.

"He can't come now," said Helen decisively, before Mr. Bidgood had found time to swallow his heart and utter a reply.

"Oh, nonsense, he must," said Tingle.

With a mighty effort Mr. Bidgood got himself under control. "Just slip along with you—far as the top platform—tell the second," he said jerkily. "Can't come further—'fraid of messing up uniform."

It was lucky this speech had been arranged beforehand. Had he been called upon to compose one for himself at the moment, he would have failed miserably.

They went down the poop ladder before him, first Tingle and Canaba, and then the captain, and proceeded along the deck. The Spaniard's politeness threatened to be embarrassing; he always wanted to go last.

Mr. Bidgood, even in that stressful hour, could not but admire the captain's cool demeanour. It was the same old Porter he had known and respected for nearly twenty years, and, in spite of all, had nothing but respect for now. Once again they were comrades-in-arms, stepping out to victory. Once again they surveyed together the backs of

their enemies. The captain at the door of the engine-room even thumped them. "In you get; mind the step," said he, the picture of joviality. He waited, clearly with the intention of thumping Mr. Bidgood's.

A lump came into Mr. Bidgood's throat as he suffered the blow. It occurred to him suddenly that maybe his friend had struck him for the last time.

He watched them one by one turn round on the doormat, and, crawling slowly down the ladder, disappear from view, only to appear again below the grating on which he stood.

He heard the contest in politeness between them as to who should first descend the ladder to the platform, and Captain Porter's joking remark that they were all mighty polite when there was a chance of a broken neck. His trained ears detected above the noise of the machinery the second engineer's greeting, the shuffling of feet on the iron platform, a laugh or two. Then a door banged. They had gone into the stokehold.

In a tremble of excitement he walked across the grating, and took his stand beside the hand wheel which worked the tunnel door. In spite of his care, the noise he made in doing so sounded intensely loud. Everything about the engine-room appeared to have grown distorted and smaller. The low pressure piston rod, working up and down a few yards away below him, seemed to have a kink in it. Yet the engines were moving smoothly enough, although very slowly. Dust clung to the white-painted walls, on one of which wavering patches of sunlight delicately registered the almost imperceptible rolling of the vessel. At the edge of a black cylinder cover something small and white was lying. It looked like a piece of torn paper. At another time he would have felt a desire to descend and remove it. But it appealed to him now merely as a detail in a picture.

His every fibre was strained to listen. His heart beat heavily. Amid the thudding of cranks, the clicking o-

valves, the hissing of leaking steam, he sought to detect the sound of the stokehold door being opened.

It came at last, after a period of waiting which had threatened to be interminable, and he caught, through two or three gratings, a faint glimpse of them as they filed round the back of the engines. A lamp gleamed and disappeared. Someone had entered the tunnel.

He stood, grasping the hand wheel and tense with excitement. Trickle of sweat upon his brow had suddenly become rivulets, drenching him, blinding him. He shook his head and a shower fell.

"Now then, gentlemen," he heard the captain shout. "In with you." Then a murmur.

"Oh, I'm not going up the tunnel," said the captain. "Been up a hundred times already."

The light reappeared and remained stationary. There was evidently a hitch somewhere. Perspiration was now running off Mr. Bidgood and down between the bars of the grating, literally in streams.

"Some of your pipes seem to be leaking, Mr. Evans," he heard the colonel shout in his high, peculiar voice.

Another murmur. They were looking up! Through the network of gratings he could see their faces. Oh! drat it . . . drat it!

"Well, if you're not going, I'm off," said the captain.

"There's a man standing by the tunnel door hand wheel!" screamed the second engineer suddenly. "Stop him! It's a trap!"

And then there arose a sudden confusion of shouts and yells. He caught a glimpse of figures running past the engines, heard awful sounds of cursing, scuffling, snarling, let go the hand wheel and rushed madly down the ladder.

"They've got me, Bidgood," the captain shouted in a gasp. "They've got me. . . . Run for your life. . . . It's all up!"

Mr. Bidgood stopped sharp in his descent, and seeing the angry face of Tingle below him, swarmed the ladder again with a speed born of despair and dashed out on deck, clanging to behind him the iron door of the engine-room.

"Look out!" he shouted as he tore aft. "They've discovered us. They're coming!"

He clambered on to the poop, and found the owner with the mate already at the side of the two ladies, assisting them towards the companion and trying to reassure them. The expression of fear on Mary's face was agonising in its intensity. She made no sound, but clung with both arms round Helen, who, desperately pale, supported her.

"Here, Mr. Bidgood, take this, and help Dixon to keep them off," said Thomas Todd in an agitated whisper, pulling a revolver from his coat pocket, and thrusting it into Mr. Bidgood's hand.

At his action Helen gave a gasp and stood for a moment very still, looking at him fiercely. "Why, you . . . you knew!" she broke out. "Oh! . . . Oh!" She shook her arm away. "I don't want your help!" she cried. "I'd rather—" She turned to Mary and, making a violent effort, half lifted, half supported her down the stairway.

Mr. Bidgood going below for one or two guns a moment later found them both sitting on the saloon settee, locked in each other's arms and sobbing violently.

It was a difficult situation for a tender-hearted man, intensified by the fact that the guns were stored directly under where they sat. Moreover, he was in a hurry, for although when he left the deck none of the mutineers had put in an appearance, the turmoil forward indicated that they might do so at any moment.

He wiped the streaming perspiration from his forehead with the back of his hand. "Missy," he whispered huskily, "Mr. Todd sent me—"

"Well, what is it?" cried Helen, turning on him. "What

do you want with us? Haven't you the sense not to intrude at a moment like this?"

The swiftness of her attack took his breath away. He stood and gaped.

"Go back to your master," she continued, "and tell him that we will have nothing to do with either him or his messengers."

"But you're sitting on top of the guns and cartridges," explained Mr. Bidgood.

"Oh!" said Helen blankly. She got up and, followed by Mary, went to a seat at the far end of the saloon.

Mr. Bidgood tore up the cushion of the settee, groped feverishly in the locker, and eventually departed with three rifles and a box of cartridges.

The noise of voices forward still continued, but none of the mutineers were yet visible. A brazen sun beat fiercely down on a deck empty even of shadows, ominous in its loneliness.

"Couldn't Porter have got away?" asked the mate feverishly, opening a packet of cartridges.

"No," said Mr. Bidgood. "There were four of 'em holding him—two of 'em firemen. He told me to run for it—I was slipping down to give him a hand."

"Is he hurt?" asked Thomas Todd, tugging at the breach of one of the rifles. "Dear me! Do you know how to open these?"

"I'm blest if I do," said the mate, frantically tugging at another.

"But they're modern magazine rifles," said Thomas Todd excitedly. "Bought especially in case of attack by Chinese pirates. There must be some simple way."

Mr. Bidgood, saying he used to own a Snider, snatched up the remaining one, and tried his hand without success. For a minute they all struggled desperately.

"What are we to do?" asked Thomas Todd at last,

jerkily. "They'll be here in a minute, and—and—we're helpless."

Again Mr. Bidgood was able to suggest something.

"Miss Clatworthy knows all about these things, sir," he said. "She's got a brother in the volunteers."

"Oh! She told me," muttered Thomas Todd. "Tut, tut! Dear me." He wiped his brow in a distracted way.

"A nice thing to have to ask a woman about," growled the mate.

They bent over their weapons again in another frantic effort.

"Mr. Bidgood," said Thomas Todd at last, with a gulp, "really—if you don't mind—go down and ask Miss Clatworthy to step this way a moment."

"But she's in an awful temper, sir," said Mr. Bidgood. "As good as told me never to come near her again."

"Tell her it's urgent, a question of life or death," gasped Thomas Todd. "Say we can't do without her. . . . Oh, gracious me!"

"Won't anyone else go?" asked Mr. Bidgood doubtfully. They both shook their heads. So he departed hurriedly on his mission.

The two girls were sitting just as he had left them, but their sobs had ceased, and it seemed to him that the elder, at any rate, looked almost her usual self again.

"Excuse me, if you please, miss," he said to her from the doorway. "I'm in a great hurry. I don't want to worry you, but we're in a bit of a hole on deck."

"Come in," she said, "and say what you want. Perhaps I was hasty just now."

"Don't speak about it," urged Mr. Bidgood in relieved tones. "The fact of the matter is, miss," he went on rapidly, "these rifles have fair tied us up into a knot,"

"What?" exclaimed Helen.

"Don't know how they work. Can't open them," growled Mr. Bidgood, looking down.

"You mean to say that none of you three men know how to load a rifle?" she asked in obvious amazement.

"That's it," confessed Mr. Bidgood shamefacedly.

"I don't believe you!" said Helen. She sprang to her feet, and ran swiftly up on deck.

"Give it to me," she said to Thomas Todd. She snatched the weapon and, with a sharp turn, opened the breach. "There——" she said.

They still appeared puzzled. "I see that I shall have to look after myself," she remarked in bitter tones. She stooped for cartridges. "What are you standing about here for, like—like sheep?" she asked.

"Waiting for them to come along," explained Mr. Bidgood with much fierceness.

"I'm afraid they'll have an easy task," she retorted.

"They'll shoot you all down in a minute. You must make some shelter. Get the saloon cushions. Anything! Look at those steps too! Can't you undo those steps, and pull them up?"

Mr. Bidgood ran at the steps and tore desperately at the fastening, thankful for being able to do something useful. The nut of a bolt was rusted, too stiff for ordinary fingers, but his strength was that of a madman. He heard them scuffling about behind him, the soft thud of cushions thrown down on the deck, and the voice of Helen as she gave directions.

The bugle rang out again forward.

"Have you finished, Mr. Bidgood?" cried Helen.

"Just about, miss," he shouted, lying flat on the deck and working desperately.

"They're coming!" cried a voice which he recognised as Mary's. "Oh, do be quick!"

The iron deck rang with the tramp of marching men.

In a frenzy he wrenched round, with bruised fingers, the last remaining nut, pushed out the bolts, and, scrambling to his feet, stooped, and with a mighty effort drew the ladder up on deck.

"Come here!" cried Helen. He rushed and joined her behind the companion, and at the same instant a small body of armed men began to file through the alley-way, and line up by the hatch. At the sight Mary began to sob again.

"Mr. Todd," said Helen, in a tense voice. "For everyone's sake, tell me what is in those barrels!"

"Gunpowder," he blurted out. He lay with the mate behind a pile of cushions near the forward end of the poop. When she spoke he half turned to answer her. "Dear me—if I'd known——" he began to excuse himself.

"Don't talk of that now," broke in Helen. "What's the use? If you don't lie down you'll get shot."

"The six Spaniards!" gasped Mr. Bidgood, his heart bounding more fiercely than ever. "Look at their swords and pistols."

A figure in a highly ornamented white uniform appeared at the entrance of the alley-way, and at once six bayonets flashed in the presenting of arms. It was Colonel Tingle.

"He's carrying a white flag," muttered Mr. Bidgood. "He wants to speak to us. I'd like to bash his head in." As the head was cased in a helmet of gleaming brass, he might have had some difficulty.

The colonel marched slowly aft, glittering like the window of a jeweller's shop.

"If you come any closer, I'll fire," shouted the mate, suddenly, from behind a cushion.

"And so will I!" cried Mr. Bidgood, pointing his rifle and just escaping pulling the trigger.

"What do you want?" asked Helen, stepping from her shelter and walking to the rail. "Don't get up," she said

in a low voice to Thomas Todd. "They won't fire at a woman." He obeyed her.

The colonel, who had already halted, now saluted elaborately. He wore a row of medals on his tunic, and black boots reaching to the thighs. There were leather gauntlets on his hands. He was perspiring freely.

"This ship is now in the possession of His Majesty," he cried in a loud voice. "Resistance is useless; I advise you to yield. If you do not we shall attack you, and I shall not be responsible for what happens."

"And what terms do you offer?" asked Thomas Todd, peeping out.

"Your lives will be spared. Nothing else."

"And the women?"

"Their lives will be spared," replied the colonel. He paused a moment and then added with emphasis, "Things being as they are I guarantee nothing else."

"You villains!" cried the mate, jumping to his feet.

"Where's Porter, you nasty old wretch?" shouted Mr. Bidgood. He came out in to the open, regardless of the danger, and shook his fist.

"Do you know what we're going to do with you, eh?" yelled the colonel in a fury. He drew his hand across his throat, laughing horribly.

Mr. Bidgood subsided.

"One word before you go, Colonel Tingle," said the mate. "The chart-room is full of gunpowder, and we have a rifle trained on it. As a last resort we shan't think twice about blowing up the ship."

"We move the gunpowder first thing in the morning," shouted the colonel. "I give you until then to make up your minds."

He turned and rejoined his men, and the whole band disappeared into the alley-way.

CHAPTER XXI

HELEN waited till the last man had disappeared, and turned to Mary.

"I wish we—had never come on this—horrid ship," Mary exclaimed, in a fresh burst of sobbing.

"Do try and be braver," said Helen firmly. "Come down into the saloon and drink a glass of water. You mustn't go on like this. Everyone will be calling you a baby." She led her off.

This happened at the very feet of Mr. Bidgood, and made him feel exceedingly uncomfortable. His heart, which had already done an extraordinary amount of work that day, was now beating in such a fashion as to bring a strange lump into his throat, and more than a suspicion of moisture into either eye.

He produced a red cotton handkerchief, and wiped his face hastily. "Drat this sweating!" he called out for the benefit of the others. He walked towards them.

"Do you think they mean to attack us?" asked the mate, sitting up.

"Really, judging from all I can see, I believe they do," answered Thomas Todd. "It seems a most absurd action. Quite uncalled for, quite—oh, it's awful!"

Mr. Bidgood agreed.

"It's not so much for myself that I mind," went on Thomas Todd. "When one leaves home, one expects to rough it a little. But those poor ladies. I'd—do almost

anything. But these people don't seem inclined to negotiate—at least, not on a reasonable basis. Now put it to you, do they?"

"We shall have to go on watch to-night," the mate remarked.

"No, but what do you think about it, Mr. Dixon?" asked Thomas Todd. "Don't you think it's an unreasonable basis?"

"There's no moon either," said the mate in depressed tones. "They may try to catch us in the darkness. I suppose they've put Skinner in charge," he went on, "a man that hardly knows a star from a headlight. And I believe it's going to blow too." He went on talking about the weather. Presently he stopped and stared.

The second engineer had appeared at the end of the alley-way. He took off his hat to them mockingly.

"How's old whiskers?" he yelled.

Mr. Bidgood, full of indignation, raised his rifle. "Let me have a bat at him, sir," he urged.

"No, no, not on any account," said Thomas Todd. "Take no notice. I don't mind what he says about my appearance. I can stand anything."

"On our way to the Philippines. Coming to cut those whiskers in the morning," continued the second engineer.

"No time now. D'ye see this?" He held up a hammer and chisel. "Just off to get my month's pay out of the safe." He disappeared, and presently they heard the sound of hammering.

"He's breaking into the safe," said Thomas Todd, listening. "What a criminal thing to do. And so useless too. Everything of value is in the saloon." He pulled out his watch, and remarked that it was after three o'clock.

"The ladies had better have a bite of something," suggested Mr. Bidgood, whose stomach was now reminding

him of their necessities. The others agreed, but nobody made a movement to carry out the suggestion.

Presently Helen appeared on deck, hurrying towards them. "Oh, what are you all doing? The sure something's happened! There's a queer gurgling sound under the saloon floor."

She began running back, and Mr. Bidgood, making a queer gurgling sound also, ran after her. For the explanation of the noise she had heard had been explained to him. He rushed below, kicked aside a piece of linoleum on the floor, and bending, caught hold of a ring bolt and tore up a square of planking. A lead pipe lay revealed and the rush of water sounded very plain.

"The devils!" he roared, and sprang across to the locker.

"What is it?" asked Helen.

"They've drained away every drop of water from the tank, miss, that's what it is," he answered, groping frantically in the locker. "And us talking there on deck. I might ha' known Evans would have done that."

"And—the filter's nearly empty," said Helen. "I took a glass of water from it just now. What carelessness!"

Mr. Bidgood had found a hammer and chisel. He pushed her aside in a great fluster, and stooping, severed the pipe. A trickle of water flowed from it for an instant, and then stopped.

They looked at each other aghast, and Mary, catching fresh fear from their expression, started sobbing again a little.

"Of course, there's the beer, miss," pointed out Mr. Bidgood in extenuation of his negligence.

"Beer!" exclaimed Helen. "Don't talk to me of beer!" Never before in his career had he heard that liquid referred to so contemptuously.

"Go up and tell the others about this fresh misfortune," she continued. She crossed over and sat beside Mary.

Really, he was very glad to go, so witheringly did she look at him. The others, too, sitting there on watch, were far from pleasant. Of course the owner did not directly blame him for the loss of the water, but he did not look at all pleased. The mate said nothing. Energy seemed to have left both of them. They sat brooding.

The decks were still very quiet. A couple of sailors passed along on their way to the bridge, and presently Tingle appeared, and stared peacefully aft through opera glasses.

"What are the ladies to do about water?" asked Thomas Todd in tones of utter misery. "I did rely on that tank"—Mr. Bidgood flinched. "Don't you think there may be still a little drain in the bottom of it?"

"Perhaps it may rain," suggested the mate, looking up at a sky which, in its flawless blue, gave small promise of such a happening.

He seemed correct nevertheless in his expectation that they would soon be in for a blow, for already a breeze had sprung up on the port side, and the ruffled surface of the ocean shewed a crest or two.

"Can't they drink beer?" asked Mr. Bidgood. "Don't you think if I was to go down and persuade them, sir, they might take a sip, and a nibble at a biscuit? It would put heart into them. Not but what Miss Clatworthy hasn't got heart enough for two already."

"Go down and try. It would be very kind of you," said Thomas Todd.

Mr. Bidgood thanked him, and withdrew.

He found Mary still sobbing faintly. Where she got all the tears from was a mystery, but then so were all the ways of women. The corkscrew lay where he had hidden it; that was the main thing. Those tears should soon be dried. The meal he would give them would be a tempting

one. They would be compelled to eat. He drew the cork of a bottle of beer, and poured some of the contents into two glasses, then turned and eyed the ladies wistfully. They seemed hardly to notice him. Ah! no matter. He spread a napkin carefully, he garnished it about with knives and forks, and cheese, and ham, and pickled onions; he drew plates from the pantry racks, and polished them. Then turned again.

"Miss Clatworthy," he said in the voice he kept for invalids.

"Well, what is it?" she asked.

In a melancholy manner he pointed to the feast. "Come now," he urged. "Do try to pick a bit."

"Is it tiffin time?"

"It must be nearly four o'clock."

"Mary," said Helen, leaning over her. "Tiffin is ready; do try and eat a little."

"I—I don't think I can," answered Mary in a weak little voice.

"What, not if me and Miss Clatworthy 'ave some with you?" asked Mr. Bidgood persuasively.

"You'll keep Mr. Bidgood from having any if you don't," Helen told her. "After all his kindness in bringing it."

"Oh, don't mind me," said Mr. Bidgood, pausing in the act of slicing the ham. He put down the knife and fork and stared at Mary despairingly. It made him irritated, indeed it did, to see such thanklessness.

"If you don't start soon, miss," he said, a tone of severity creeping into his voice, "we shall begin without you." He meant to frighten her, and apparently succeeded, for she at once allowed Helen to put the tumbler to her lips, and hold it there.

Mr. Bidgood heaved a sigh of relief, and finished cutting the slice of ham.

"Come now, that's right," said he. "Nobody was ever the better for an empty stomach."

"Except Jonah's whale," said Mary, looking up. She actually smiled.

It was wonderful what a little tact did. "Now, now, ham and pickled onions?"

The meal was another of his successes. His laurel wreath felt firmer. There seemed no longer need for a piece of elastic under the chin.

"And now, miss," he remarked to Helen comfortably at last, "do you know what I want? A smoke!" He eyed them nervously.

"Do smoke, please, Mr. Bidgood," they duetted.

Mr. Bidgood raised the cushion of the settee, and brought to light a black briar pipe, matches, and a tobacco pouch.

"You seem to have everything here," Helen observed, looking at him inquisitively.

"Everything, bar water," Mr. Bidgood agreed. "Somehow, none of us thought about filling the filter. The tobacco smoke don't make you feel squeamish with this bit of a jobble on the sea?" he asked.

The ship was beginning to pitch perceptibly, but the girls were both good sailors, so they told him.

"Mr. Todd must have expected this mutiny for a long time," pursued Helen.

Mr. Bidgood stopped puffing, and eyed her enquiringly. "Didn't know about it till a day or two ago. He thought it was going to blow over," said he, and began to puff furiously. "If you ask me I think it will blow over," he continued with the intention of comforting them. "Any way, they can't do much if the weather freshens up like this."

"Why didn't you tell us about it?"

"Never know when it's going to come on in these

waters," began Mr. Bidgood. "The monsoon might bust at any time——"

But he could not put her off. "Why didn't you tell us about this mutiny?" she persisted.

"Oh . . . that?" said Mr. Bidgood, puffing more furiously than ever. "Well, as a matter of fact, you see, me and Captain Porter——" he hesitated.

"But Mr. Todd?"

"He wanted to tell you directly he knew for certain," explained Mr. Bidgood uneasily. It was getting rather warm down there in the cabin, but he was determined nothing should induce him to reveal the reason why she was not admitted to their secret. He felt sorry now that he had not taken the owner's side on the question.

"I think I'll away to the deck and see how they're getting along," he said rising. The plates on the table were beginning to slide about, and now and then there was a slight vibration of the stern, as the propeller raced momentarily.

"It must be quite rough outside," Helen remarked, as she and Mary helped clear the table. "Listen to that," she said a moment later.

"We're going to catch it and no mistake," said Mr. Bidgood.

With a pleased expression on his face he mounted the stairs, accommodating himself easily to the jerky motion of the vessel. At the top of them he encountered a breeze, the force of which surprised him. It came from the port quarter, and, looking in the eye of it, he saw a dim horizon, and a hard blue sky. The sun was still shining, but on a sea that made its presence incongruous. Gloom had been fitter company for the waves that were now visible, stiff, angry waves; the breeze tore the tops off them. It attempted to do the same with Mr. Bidgood's beard, and appeared anxious to strip him of the blue uniform. Showers of spray flew across the deck, breaking up the sunshine into

a shimmer of rainbows. The awning was flapping viciously. Mr. Bidgood looked forward, and noticed that the one above the bridge had already been hauled in. Worse weather than this was evidently expected, or they would have hardly taken such a precaution.

He advanced towards the mate, who was still sitting in the same position, with his rifle in his lap, and asked him what he thought of it.

"I don't believe it's going to be much," replied the mate in a loud voice, nodding towards Thomas Todd, who sat huddled together a few feet away. "He's feeling a bit squeamish," he added in a whisper. "Says he's all right on a big ship, but can't stand this. Where have you been all this time?"

"Getting the ladies to peck a bit," Mr. Bidgood told him.

"Some of their breadcrumbs have lodged on your waistcoat," observed the mate. Mr. Bidgood brushed himself testily. As he grew older breadcrumbs shewed an irritating tendency to lodge on his waistcoat.

The mate rose, and saying that he was going down to get a biscuit or something, handed Mr. Bidgood the rifle.

"Is it all right?" asked Mr. Bidgood. "You just go on pulling and pulling at this trigger, don't you?"

"That's it," the mate replied. "Not that anything's going to happen just now," he added. "I've been watching them for'ard there. Tingle, Canaba, and the whole lot of them are feeling the weather. Look at that!" A stout man in a white uniform rushed from the alley-way, and leant brooding over the side. Mr. Bidgood recognised the colonel.

"They're all like that," said the mate with a short laugh. "If the weather gets worse Evans 'll be as bad. You know the sort of sailor he is."

The weather did get worse, and presently Mr. Bidgood

found himself administering to the urgent wants of the owner.

"Oh . . . oh!" said Thomas Todd. "This is awful. . . . You've no idea of what a dreadful sinking feel. . . ."

Mr. Bidgood turned his head away compassionately.

"Ladies all right?" gasped Thomas Todd after a time, hopefully.

"First rate, sir," said Mr. Bidgood. "Never felt better in their lives. They've just had a good feed of beer, cheese, pickled onions, and a slice apiece of ham with——"

"Dear me—oh!" said Thomas Todd, turning away again.

He was very ill, so ill, in fact, that it seemed to Mr. Bidgood impossible that he could be ill any more. But he was, and the paroxysm so contorted him that Mr. Bidgood was fain to clasp him in the fear that he might fly asunder.

It was thus, with their backs to the enemy, that the ladies found them a minute or two afterwards. A rifle was beginning to roll up and down the deck. "Look at this!" cried Helen, and ran and picked it up.

"Why, it might have gone off and killed someone," she said to Mr. Bidgood.

"Mr. Todd's feeling the motion badly," he pointed out in excuse.

The two ladies went to the other side of the poop. Helen rescued Mr. Bidgood's pipe from the scupper, and then took Mary's arm. They faced the stern for a few moments and, steadying themselves on the heaving deck, watched a sunset which, in its want of colour, might have been a tin one. The horizon shewed crinkled and clear against the sinking disc.

"I do feel cold," Mary complained. They walked up and down once or twice, a difficult task in that weather. The breeze had begun to abate somewhat, but the waves were bigger than before, and the *Susan Dale* dipped and

ducked among them, her propeller as busy as a terrier at a rat hole.

Mr. Bidgood, from his position near the owner, caught scraps of their conversation now and then.

"It must be dreadful to be a bad sailor!" This was Mary.

"I do like to see people manly."—Helen.

"But he can't help——"—Mary.

"This petty, puling sickness!"—Helen, very loudly. Thomas Todd also heard this, and, turning in a pea-green pallor, caught her look.

"Isn't he bad!" remarked Mary.

Helen stopped to stamp her foot.

Twilight deepened. There was a figure on the bridge that might have been Bunn, but he never, so far as Mr. Bidgood saw, turned their way. Perhaps Tingle really intended to wait until morning before molesting them. Perhaps he was waiting for night. Yes, that was just the sort of thing he would do, disturb people at night. "That nasty bloodthirsty son of a——" The ladies, both of them, were looking worried. Poor girls! They would not be able to sleep that night—that night with its possibilities of surprise and disaster. . . . Happy thought! Perhaps if they couldn't sleep they would consent to watch, while he, Mr. Bidgood, and the owner snatched a few minutes slumber. Yes, it might be so!—Where was it, now, he had read of something similar—when the robins came and dropped dead leaves— Ah, no! That was the "Babes in the Wood." It must have been some other story. No matter! He would perhaps drop a hint later on.

Musing thus, Mr. Bidgood stood patiently beside his now inactive owner. Presently a quick footfall aroused him, and looking up he beheld Helen. She had no eyes for him.

"Mr. Todd," she said softly. Apparently the owner did not hear her.

"Er—er—Thomas." She put her hand firmly on his shoulder, and gave a timid pull.

Mr. Bidgood's back was now towards them ; so was his ear. He saw Mary disappearing round the companion on her way to the saloon. He heard the owner's weak exclamation of surprise.

"Yes, it is I," Helen said coaxingly.

"Oh—dear ! Oh, what a weakling you must think me. And—I can never—forgive myself—for putting you to all this inconvenience."

"Don't talk of it any more," Mr. Bidgood heard her say gently. "You can't help the weakness, can you ? And it's all over. . . . And . . . and everything's over. Can't you understand ?"

Mr. Bidgood thought it was not difficult to see what she was driving at.

"You don't mean to say that you pardon me ?" the owner gasped. Mr. Bidgood could not help thinking that if she did she had expressed herself in rather a roundabout way. He listened hard for the reply.

"Come, be your true self," she urged. "Make an effort !"

What the owner's reply was Mr. Bidgood never knew, for at that moment he heard a sharp tapping on the deck below, and rushing forward perceived in the gloom the colonel squatting against the hatch.

"Go away at once, or I'll blow your brains out," said Mr. Bidgood, flourishing his rifle in great indignation.

"Can't you see I'm waving a white flag ?" whispered the colonel irritably. "Tell Mr. Todd I want to speak to him," he added. "Say it's very important."

"Mr. Todd's busy just now," Mr. Bidgood told him.

"No, he's not," cried Helen, coming up behind.

"I feel much better," said Thomas Todd. "Who is it

wants me? Where is he?" Standing alongside Mr. Bidgood he peered over the rail.

"Oh, do put down those rifles," whispered the colonel below nervously. "One of them might go off and alarm the whole ship. I'm absolutely without a weapon of any kind!" He stood erect, and held up his arms in an effort to prove the statement.

"Tell us what you want," said Helen sharply.

"I'm not here on government business at all," explained the colonel. "I'm just *ex-officio*, a private individual, and really, your well-wisher. I don't want to do any harm to anybody, but a soldier, as you know, has to obey orders. All my men are so angry; I can scarcely hold them. They want to start bloodshedding at once. There's only one thing to keep them back——"

"And what's that?" asked Mr. Bidgood eagerly.

"The picture."

"Well, that's not much," said Mr. Bidgood. "Shall I go and get it, sir?" he enquired, turning to the owner.

"Yes—no. What do you think?" Thomas Todd asked Helen.

"The picture isn't finished yet," said Helen, "and you owe me three pounds for it. But if you will faithfully promise——"

"What, that daub?" said the colonel furiously.

"Daub!" exclaimed Helen. "You impertinent man!"

"I want the other one," went on the colonel. "The one you stole from the Malay woman."

"Yes, yes," said Thomas Todd. "Dear me! Well, I think we might arrange——"

"Don't hand it to him on any account," Helen whispered viciously. "He mustn't have it."

Thomas Todd eyed her in great hesitation. "But—but—but he must!" said he.

"Can't you see that the possession of it's vital to him?" asked Helen intensely. "You remember how careful he was in taking it off the mail steamer! You told me."

So he had; that was true. He recalled the scene: Tingle disembarking; his remark, "If you smash it you smash me!" Really, it seemed as if— And yet—

"I'm afraid, very much afraid, we can't meet you," he said to the colonel, as conciliatingly as he knew how. "You see—er—it's the only security of yours we have deposited with us."

"By Heavens, if you don't it will be the worse for you," hissed Tingle, steadying himself against the hatch. "I'll show mercy to none of you, none. Now listen to me, Todd," he continued in smoother tones. "I don't know where you obtained your information from—probably you've been talking to that Malay woman and her husband—and they'd better not let me lay hands on them—but you seem to be under quite a wrong impression about that picture. It is not of any value. We can do without it very well. At the same time, for sentimental reasons, I should like to have it by me, and if you hand it over now I will do what I can to see that you all have decent treatment when we do get to the Philippines. That's a promise. Oh!"

A huge wave slapped violently against the side, and a tongue of water fell on the deck, drenching him. He clutched the hatch.

"Don't trust him," whispered Helen to Thomas Todd.

"I'm not going to," he answered firmly. "Where's Captain Porter?" he asked Tingle.

"Locked up," screamed the colonel, shivering. "And by Heavens—" he checked himself. "Give me the picture," he said.

"I won't," returned Thomas Todd.

"Then I'll——" He clapped his hand to his mouth and rushed precipitately forward. It was the third and biggest of three waves, heaving the *Susan Dale* in the air like a swing, that had done his business.

They watched him stop and lean over the bulwarks abaft the alley-way, and then both turned to the owner, and congratulated him on his decision. As Mr. Bidgood pointed out, the picture could be handed over first thing in the morning, if Mr. Todd changed his mind. "Of course, sir, they may rush the ship to-night, and try to take it from you," he added, pointing out, as was his duty, the risk that might be incurred.

"Where is the picture now?" asked Helen.

"Well, as a matter of fact," said Thomas Todd, "I have it concealed on my person. I thought—you see it appears a very valuable article, and not very big—I thought that until I found a safe to lock it in, I had better carry it with me."

"I see," said Helen. She stood, her head bent thoughtfully, tapping her foot.

"Isn't it very dangerous, sir?" asked Mr. Bidgood, in tones of deep consideration for his owner's welfare.

"That's exactly what I think," said Helen quickly. "You're a marked man. They know you have the picture."

"Do you think so? Dear me!"

"Somebody else might take care of it. Mr. Bidgood could!"

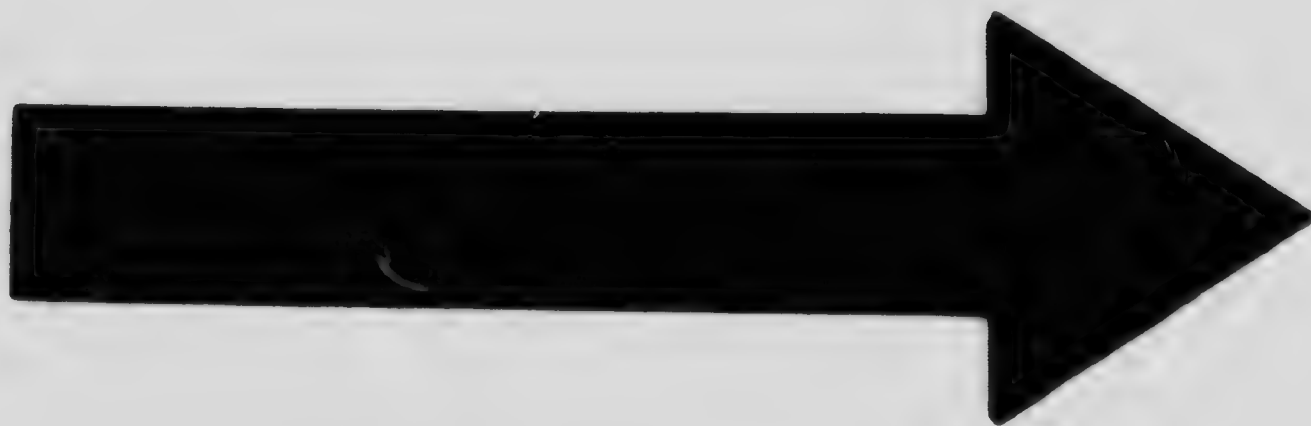
Mr. Bidgood at once said that he also was a marked man. He said that Tingle had already threatened twice to cut his throat on capture.

"Then you, of course, will never allow them to take you alive," said Helen.

"I will not," said Mr. Bidgood emphatically.

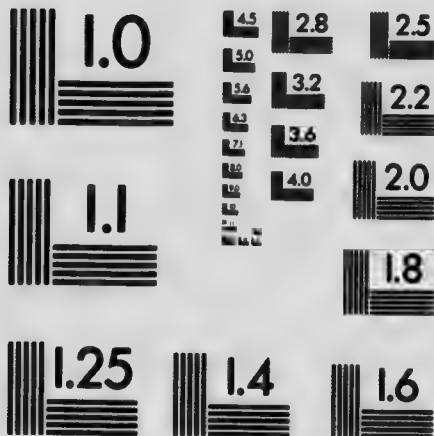
"Therefore, you're certainly the man that ought to have charge of the picture," she pointed out.

What a tongue! What an unanswerable tongue!



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CHAPTER XXII

DARKNESS now began to fall rapidly. Thin black clouds, the advance guard of a mighty army already marshalled on the horizon, were rushing across the sky. Rain threatened to come with the night. And the sea raged more fiercely than ever, battering against the iron sides of the *Susan Dale*.

The owner, when the business of transferring the picture was over, said he thought he would go and lie down for a bit, and, followed by Mr. Bidgood, made off unsteadily for the saloon. Mary and the mate appeared, walking very close together, and joined Helen at the rail. They talked of their plans for spending the night.

Presently Mr. Bidgood came back.

"Is he bad again?" asked Helen anxiously.

"Not so awful," Mr. Bidgood assured her. But she would not rest content, and needs must herself go down to look to him. "She's a kind soul," thought Mr. Bidgood, "she means well." Of course, it was of little use her going. He himself had tried every remedy available, and had now left the owner lying fairly comfortable, with a large book strapped tightly across his stomach to keep away the sinking feeling, a glass of water, and a copy of the *Police Gazette*. There was nothing omitted to soothe the man's distress, so far as he could think. In times of trouble he himself usually turned to his *Police Gazette*, so he told Mary and the mate. There was always somebody

to be found in its pages who was worse off than he was; and no doubt the owner would derive a similar consolation from its perusal. Had there been brandy to hand, he said, he would have used that at once, having an unfailing belief in its efficacy for all kinds of illness. Unfortunately—er—there was none available.

They sympathised.

"I should like to get into my cabin," muttered Mr. Bidgood, rather irrelevantly.

"So should we," said Mary. "All our things are there. Why isn't the entrance to it through the saloon, instead of outside?"

"You see, it's handier to the engines like that, and I can go about dirty if I want to without going into the saloon," Mr. Bidgood explained.

"Oh," said Mary.

"Not that I go about dirty much," added Mr. Bidgood. "My work is mostly headwork."

They remained silent for a while after that, watching the dim waves go rolling by. The main deck was now very often covered with a layer of rushing water. The breeze struck raw and miserable. Presently Helen came back, bringing the owner with her. He said he felt better, and that the saloon had grown very stuffy.

"If I could get at my bag!" said Helen. "There are some tabloids in it that would make you feel quite right again. But it's in Mr. Bidgood's cabin."

"Oh, that unfortunate cabin!" exclaimed Mary. "Everything is in it. Our combs, our brushes, our—everything."

"I'll go and get them," said Dixon. "It won't take a minute."

But they would not allow him to. Mr. Bidgood, especially, remarked that it could not be permitted on any account. The owner said nothing, but walked away, and,

at a little distance, leant against the rail. The rest, with their backs towards him, carried on a desultory conversation, from which gaiety was utterly absent. They were becoming dulled by misfortune, indifferent to the sufferings of others. After a while even Mr. Bidgood grew inattentive. And the owner, neglected and miserable, robbed by the sea of all his dignity, clung brooding to the rail. They seemed to him unconscious of his existence. A galling situation !

"Really, I can't stand this inaction any longer," cried suddenly, in feeble irritation. "I will get your hair brushes . . . and the tabloids."

Before they could prevent him he had clambered over the rail, and dropped down on to the deck below. They heard him open the cabin door.

"Sir, sir!" called out Mr. Bidgood, expostulating. "Well, of all the dare devils——"

The mate began to follow. "No, one's enough," cried Helen, holding out a restraining arm. "Oh, keep a good watch, do!" She snatched the astonished Mr. Bidgood by the rifle and stood, peering forward. "If they come now——!" he heard her mutter.

It had grown almost dark, and the bridge deck was barely visible. The shadows about the entrances of the alley-ways and in the corners of the deck were black as ink. Hardly a lamp had been lit in the ship that night. She cast no cheerful light about her, but moved, sad, and slow, and desolate, through the sea.

"I hope he finds the tabloids," said Helen. "Do you think he would hear if I shouted?"

"I'm sure he wouldn't," Mr. Bidgood replied. "You mustn't make a noise. It might raise the enemy. If you like I'll speak to him through the ventilator."

He stooped to do so, and was astonished to hear the owner's voice.

"Why," he said, "those two Malays are down there. The impudent rascals! What do they want in my cabin?"

"I remember," said Helen excitedly. "They were in there, tidying up, when the mutiny occurred this morning. Ask him what he is going to do."

Mr. Bidgood stooped again. "Both the Malays are very sick," he reported. "Mr. Todd's very sick, too. Hasn't found the tablets, as he can't light the lamp."

"Why doesn't he carry matches?" exclaimed Helen irritably. "Oh, the utter helplessness of some people! You ought not to have let him go, Mr. Dixon." She turned to Mr. Bidgood. "Tell him to come up again at once!" she said.

Mr. Bidgood stooped again. "He says he can't come up," he reported, "as he has shut the door, and, what with the movement and his squeamishness, he's now so dizzy that he doesn't know where the door is. He wants me to tell you, Miss Clatworthy, that as long as you're safe he doesn't care at the moment what becomes of him." He listened again. "Ah, poor fellow, poor fellow!" he muttered, rising and shaking his head. "No matter, you'll be better by-and-bye. This pitching is enough to queer anybody."

"It's so absurd for people to enter on heroic undertakings when they're not fitted for it physically," went on Helen snappishly. "He mustn't remain in that cabin. Mr. Bidgood, will you try——"

"Look!" exclaimed the mate, interrupting her. "There's somebody coming aft."

Mr. Bidgood, in an ecstasy of alarm, sprang to the rail. A small, white-clad figure was to be seen cautiously descending the ladder from the bridge deck. Who it was his hurried eyes did not inform him.

He sprang back to the ventilator. "Mr. Todd!" he

whispered breathlessly. "There's somebody coming. Don't, for dear sake, open the door. Bolt it!"

"Really, I've told you," said the owner, "I don't know where the door is. I don't know where anything is. They can come and kill me if they like."

"I'm sorry you're so bad, sir," said Mr. Bidgood respectfully. He turned again to the rail.

Meanwhile the white figure had approached half-way along the deck, and now stood on a winch pipe cover waiting for a wash of water to run back into the scupper. The rapidly growing darkness hindered identification, but in a while, a blue flash of lightning low on the horizon illuminating sea and sky, revealed every detail of the ship.

"Why, it's Bunn!" said Mr. Bidgood, instantly. A clap of thunder followed his remark.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mary, clinging to the first thing handy, which happened to be the mate. "That always makes me so afraid."

He at once extended a protecting arm. "There's no danger—not a bit," he assured her. But she only shrank the closer.

"The lightning always makes me feel horribly afraid."

The rain began to fall in bucketfuls. When the next flash came they saw that Bunn had retreated from his position on the winch pipe cover, and was now standing in the shelter of the alley-way.

"He must have been sent to watch us," remarked the mate, holding Mary tight.

"How are we to get Mr. Todd out of the cabin?" asked Helen anxiously of Mr. Bidgood. But the crash drowned his reply.

"The storm is getting closer," she remarked. "Aren't you afraid, Mary?"

"No—o, not very," Mary said. The next peal was but a faint one. She began to draw herself away.

"I wish some of the men on board were as brave as you," Helen said, across Mr. Bidgood's waistcoat. "We must get Mr. Todd out somehow."

She went across to the ventilator and listened. "Oh, they're all so bad," she called out. "Mr. Bidgood, you're an engineer. Can't you do something?"

Another flash of lightning showed her white face, showed her imploring look. The sight made his brain work wildly. Schemes in which ropes and ladders, sudden dashes and desperate muscular effort, figured, boiled within it.

"I'd smash in the deck," she cried, "rather than let him remain there in that stuffiness."

It was this remark of hers that gave him an inspiration. He left the rail suddenly, and handed her his rifle. "We'll have them out in five minutes," she heard him say, as he hurried off. In a moment or two the sound of furious hammering reached them from the saloon.

And then a squall struck the ship, an epileptic and tropical squall. Lightning streaked the warring clouds continually. The thunder was as if the world were in battle. And the wind, and the rain, and the spray, and the sea concentrated themselves for one blinding half-hour to the task of tearing each other to pieces.

Their fury almost made an end of the *Susan Dale*. She heeled over at the force of it, and then, plunging madly like a kicking colt, she righted herself and held her way. The racing propeller rumbled intermittently, shaking the stern with the strength of an earthquake, and helping the wind to tear the waves to tatters. For some five minutes, when the squall was at its height, those on the poop might have been standing close to the nozzle of a mighty fire hose, so thickly had sky and sea mingled their waters with the raging wind. Speech was impossible with these fierce and mighty noises going on around. The ship creaked and groaned unnoticed. Mary

shrieked, and the sound was snatched away and dissipated almost before she uttered it. But Helen heard, extending a protecting arm, found Mary's waist already had a tenant. She moved away and stood clinging to the rail with her rifle hugged to her side. Her wet and tangled hair blew loosely about her in the wind, her clothes were sopping wet. She had a neglected and lonely air.

The squall left them as suddenly as it came, and the black clouds, passing away, revealed a dim sky and a struggling stars. High gusty winds were succeeded by a steady breeze, and, although the sea raged still with almost unabated fury, the night grew lighter, and the rain ceased.

This rise in the barometer was signalled by the lowering of the mate's arm.

"Where's Mr. Bidgood?" asked Mary, coming forward to Helen.

"He's down in the saloon attempting to break through to Mr. Todd. Something must have happened to him."

"Do you think so?" exclaimed Mary. "I'll run and see if you like, Helen," she volunteered. At a nod she sped away.

"You seem to rather like storms," Helen observed to the mate, after a while.

"Nothing I love better," he returned enthusiastically. "Give me a good ship, and plenty of sea-room, and I'm in my element."

"You mean elbow-room?" she remarked. "I must confess I'm surprised at you. In the middle of all these dangers."

The mate stared at her stupidly for a moment, and then opened his mouth, but his reply, if he had one, was cut short by the return of Mary, who was followed by Mr. Bidgood.

"Oh, he's wonderful," cried Mary. "Do you know he's cut a doorway right through the ironwork."

"I did it with a hammer and cross-cut chisel," explained Mr. Bidgood modestly. He would have liked to tell them also that no other man in the ship could have accomplished such a task in less than twenty-four hours, but refrained. After all, deeds were their own trumpeters.

"How splendid! Are they better?" asked Helen.

"All in the saloon and doing well," said Mr. Bidgood.

"And, do you know, Mr. Bidgood found a big bottle of brandy hidden away in his cabin!" cried Mary.

"As medicine," explained Mr. Bidgood.

And then Helen, murmuring something about the lateness of the hour, caught Mary's arm and hurried her away.

"They'll be going to change," remarked Mr. Bidgood, looking into the gloom ahead. "Well, they can get at all their duds now. She's a fine woman. The way she looks after that other one is a fair treat to see."

"Ay," said the mate.

"Not that the other one's worth looking after," proceeded Mr. Bidgood, wiping the barrel of his rifle on the blue tunic. "Her goings-on with that Señor Canaba have just about given you the sick of her, I expect, haven't they? Haven't they?" urged Mr. Bidgood.

"You mind your own business," burst out the mate angrily.

After that, of course, further conversation was impossible. No mate, even though he wore brass buttons and called himself, on occasion, the first officer, had the right to address a chief engineer thus. But this was not the time to resent it. The man's mind had evidently become unhinged through the trouble of the last few hours, and the sanest policy was to treat him, like a savage dog, with dignified contempt.

Mr. Bidgood, therefore, spat ostentatiously over the rail, and, turning, essayed to walk the deck for a space and to whistle a popular air.

The pitching of the ship rendered both feats impossible of graceful accomplishment, and, after a moment of hesitation, he found it the better part to retire to a corner and survey the scene, wearing the while an expression of amused incredulity on his face. Owing to the darkness nobody could see his expression clearly, but the expression was there—he could feel it—and the knowledge comforted him.

Yes, he could afford to laugh now at all these ignorant and pretentious persons who, having been reared on the dirt of the forecabin, were now spending the remainder of their lives in trying to forget the fact. They manhandled the bridges of ships for ever, looking at nothing through telescopes, and the ignorant might gaze at them with awe and wonder; but his owner was now fully aware that it was not they, but men such as he, Mr. Bidgood, who did the work on board a vessel.

What skipper was there among them all who, in an hour, could have cut a hole in a quarter-inch iron plate as he had done? True, he had bashed his thumb severely once or twice during the operation, but nothing else could be expected when one had to work in a bad light on board of a pitching ship. His had been the first blood shed in this terrible business. He wondered whose would be the last. The luck had been with them so far, in spite of Captain Porter's mismanagement of affairs in the engine room. But he would think no more about that. It was poor work abusing a man when he was down. Past errors were better forgotten; in the future lay his concern. He tried to put on the mantle of a prophet, but found it a hopeless misfit. For the life of him he could not imagine what lay in store for them. Everything had taken such a very different course from the one he had expected. There were no cut throats, no bloodstains on the decks, no bindings to the foremast, hangings from yards and arms, walkings of planks, black flags with white skulls.

on them—nothing. The only shot fired so far had been fired by accident, and now, what with the wind, and the storm, and the general sea-sickness, it seemed entirely possible that there would never be another.

It was thus he was musing when he saw the owner appear on deck, and heard him hail the mate.

"How are you feeling now, sir?" asked Mr. Bidgood solicitously.

"Very much better, thanks to your brandy," cried Thomas Todd, approaching him jerkily over the pitching deck. "I've sent Dixon down to have something to eat, and am now going to take his place for a bit. Everything all right?"

"Not a sign of danger anywhere," said Mr. Bidgood.

"Dear me! What a wind!" exclaimed Thomas Todd, holding on to the rail.

"And a lucky thing too," Mr. Bidgood remarked.

"They won't worry us much as long as it lasts."

"They won't worry us at all, as far as I can see," Thomas Todd said, wonderfully cheerfully. "I was talking a good deal to that Malay woman when we were in the cabin, and, do you know, Mr. Bidgood, I believe we shall be safe as long as we can keep the picture. She confessed to me that she stole it."

"I never heard that," Mr. Bidgood said.

"She did, though; she told me so. Putting two and two together, from what she tells me, it appears that Tingle and his crew are on the way to the Philippines to raise a rebellion, and that they cannot do this unless they can produce that picture or one like it to show the natives. Even Tingle's followers on board, it seems, suspect that it is lost, and have been pressing to see it for the last day or two. That is why there was so much anxiety to have that one of yours painted. Isn't it extraordinary?"

"And they haven't got either!" exclaimed Mr. good. "Serve 'em jolly right, sir."

"You must be very careful, Mr. Bidgood," continued Thomas Todd earnestly. "Don't drop the picture on the deck anywhere. Make it very secure. Er—turn it well in."

Mr. Bidgood did so, and the contact of it kept him wakeful all the evening. When he sat down in the saloon later on to take a little light refreshment, the strong reminder he received took away half the taste of beer. Chafing, he paced the deck through the watches of the night, refusing even the owner's invitations to sit down for a bit.

He said that he never sat down while on duty, and in a stern tone he said it in was so stern that Thomas Todd reproached himself for daring to make such a suggestion.

Breeze and sea slackened gradually as the hours wore on, and at last the vessel merely rocked. The two gentlemen had long ago gone away to their cabin to try and get a little rest. The mate was snoring on the saloon settee and the owner lay in a long chair with a rifle at his side and to all appearances asleep.

The whole ship was strangely quiet, seeming as though she had sunk into slumber, worn out by the violence of the storm. The slow revolution of her engines told a tale of weariness, and her regularly creaking woodwork sang a song of peace.

But still Mr. Bidgood restlessly paced the poop, wide awake and very uncomfortable. He had paused from time to time in the darkness and moved the picture, but without any permanent effect. His vague contempt for artists and all their work was rapidly becoming an active dislike. He had never possessed an oil-painting before, and he vowed he never would again.

Somewhere about dawn, when the darkness hung about the ship like a shroud, and the very funnel was invisible,

it struck him that if he shifted the picture to the outside of the red flannel singlet things might be more comfortable. He retired into a corner, and, unbuttoning everything, was in the act of carrying out his idea, when suddenly, with a very slight scraping noise, the bow slid up into the air. And the *Susan Dale* listed heavily and then stopped.

CHAPTER XXIII

"H I!" shouted Mr. Bidgood excitedly, and then as nobody answered him, and as, to all appearances, the *Susan Dale* had merely slid up on a sandbank and was not a bit damaged in the process, he hurriedly adjusted his picture before taking any further proceedings.

By the time he had finished fumbling there was some show of disturbance about the bridge. A light or something flitted along, carried by invisible hands. He heard a cracked voice shouting. And as he ran to rouse the owner the engines suddenly slackened, stopped, and then went off furiously astern.

"I must have dropped asleep," said Thomas Todd, rising and rubbing his eyes. "Is there anything happening? Dear me! I've mislaid my rifle. Have you seen it anywhere?"

"We've run aground somewhere," Mr. Bidgood explained, breathing heavily.

"Run aground!" Thomas Todd exclaimed. "Impossible! I thought we were in the middle of the ocean. Where's Mr. Dixon?"

He saw the chief engineer move away towards the companion, and then ran quickly to the side. In the intense darkness the swirling water could just be distinguished below. Patches of white foam thrown off by the churning propeller floated on the surface, dimly

visible like fungi at night. Their course was forward. The deck felt rigid as a pier. This, and the very noticeable list, gave ample proof that Mr. Bidgood's remark was true. The *Susan Dale* had run aground.

The increased commotion about the bridge was now becoming very noticeable. A sound of voices raised to the pitch of anger mounted above the heavy drumming of the propeller, and among them, by its cockerel note, he easily recognised that of Colonel Tingle. It was plain even from that distance that the colonel was at first intensely surprised and grieved by the predicament in which he found himself, but later on his voice took on a more flute-like tone, and from this it might have been surmised that some means had been found to comfort him.

There was no determining just then whether the ship had struck on an ocean shoal or on the coast, although the comparative calm of the water, and an indescribable rawness about the air, seemed to suggest that the land was very close; but try as Thomas Todd would he was not able to descry the slightest sign of it.

But wherever the *Susan Dale* had struck, there apparently she intended to remain. The propeller churned the water continually, irregular outbursts of fury alternating with a speed of revolution suggestive of disgust, and anon the lowering of a boat followed by the rattle of the windlass forward indicated that those in charge had put out an anchor and were endeavouring to drag the vessel's nose round. But all their efforts were resultless. The *Susan Dale* never budged an inch.

"Is that you, Mr. Todd?" asked the mate, coming through the darkness. "I can't make it out at all," he went on gravely. "They had a clear course. Not a shoal that I know of till within fifty miles of Manila, if that's where they were bound for. Do you think there's any

possibility that Captain Porter forgot to tell them that we altered the compasses?"

"Dear me!" cried Thomas Todd. "How careless of me! I forgot about that."

"There was a look about the sea yesterday, a lay of the water that puzzled me," the mate said. "I was going to speak about it to you, but what with one thing and another it slipped my memory. Miss Clatworthy has just been saying that she particularly noticed yesterday that the sun set right over the stern."

"I remember that myself, now," the owner said, with some excitement.

"That shewed we were steering east, whereas the Philippines were north-east," explained the mate.

"But they have their sextants and their chronometers and so on," objected Thomas Todd. "I know they have because I bought them. Surely that would have prevented them from making such a mistake."

"Skinner can't use a sextant," the mate said. "He thinks he can, but he can't. And it strikes me now I ought to come to consider that they must have been monkeying with the compasses themselves. Otherwise, why should that fellow Bunn have been hanging about the bridge so much?"

"Was he hanging about the bridge?"

"I kicked him off twice myself. Of course I knew nothing about all this at the time. I wish I had," he continued bitterly, after a pause. "You'd never have got me here. Just think what those two young ladies are putting up with. It makes me sick. Fair play is what I like to see, and you haven't played fair by them."

"Dear me, don't you think so?" said Thomas Todd.

"I am sorry. And really, my conscience has been pricking me myself. I'm distressed, most distressed. Believe me, I'd give all I have to undo it."

"It sticks in my throat," said Dixon in some anger. "I've got to tell you what I think of you; and that's not much. I never knew a man yet who was keen on the dollar that was any use at all when it came to a pinch. What's the benefit of your money to you now? Tell me that."

Thomas Todd made a feeble sound.

"I'm speaking to you as man to man," cried Dixon. "I'm your employé no longer. The ship's hard and fast ashore. The next breeze will make a wreck of her. By the law, I'm off the articles and no longer in your pay."

Mr. Bidgood, standing by in the darkness, judged it time to interfere.

"You'll get your wages all right, if that's what's worrying you," said he soothingly. "Mr. Todd 'll see to that."

"Wages!" shouted the mate. "I don't want his beastly wages. It's the thought of the women that makes me mad. To think of a young girl like Miss Amerton in this situation."

"Don't you trouble your head about Miss Amerton," Mr. Bidgood told him. "I'm looking after her. I told her I would only yesterday."

"If that's the case there's nothing more to be said," returned the mate. "I wish you luck, that's all."

"I'm sorry; I really and sincerely am," said Thomas Todd. "Let us say no more."

They obeyed his wishes, leaning disconsolately against the rail. Daylight filtering in over the edge of the world found them still in this position. It was a cold and wretched dawn, pale and watery as winter milk, and it revealed the dripping *Susan Dale* lying tilted in the midst of a dreary sea. The propeller had ceased its labours for the nonce, and all that now broke the silence was the lapping of the waves as they fled by the ship on their way towards a bank of mist beyond the bow.

"There's land over there," said the mate suddenly pointing forward. "I can hear the breakers."

Mr. Bidgood made a trumpet of his ear and tried hear them also. There certainly was a faint rum somewhere.

"It can't be!" exclaimed Thomas Todd.

"It is," declared the mate excitedly. "Look at that! He pointed beyond the bow to a spot where the light was strongest. Tips of gold now shewed above the fleecy bank of mist, and the sky about them wore a faint rose tint. But what caught Mr. Bidgood's eye was a small and intensely black object in the very middle of the light, an object which resembled an ancient mushroom.

"There's a tree," he said hurriedly. "Mr. Todd! Can you see it? There!"

They had evidently noticed something on the bridge also, for at the same moment somebody there shouted an order, and in a second or two a native came into sight running up the rigging of the lopsided foremast, on which the unextinguished headlight still hung dismally.

"They don't know where we are, that's plain," the mate remarked.

"Where do you think we are, Mr. Dixon?" the owner asked.

"I wouldn't mind betting that we're somewhere on the Sarawak coast," replied the mate. "If they've made that mistake about the magnets, we can't be anywhere else."

"What, the land where the head-hunters live?" asked Mr. Bidgood, in anxious tones. Seemingly his throat was in danger ashore and afloat.

They began to discuss the possibility of a coasting steamer rescuing them. These vessels kept up a fortnightly service, the mate said, and as a rule their course was very near the land.

Meanwhile the tips of gold had grown to quivering

spears, and the sun rose gloriously. The mist dispersed into thin wrack and then dissolved, revealing the land. They were stranded in the middle of a noble bay, so perfectly shaped that the sweep of a mighty scythe might have formed it. Low capes ran out to sea on either side of them, the curved pedestal of a ridge of savage hills. The whole country was to all appearances one dense forest. There was no sign of habitation anywhere, although what might have been a clump of cocoanut palms stood at the edge of a sandy beach, grey-trunked and yellowish against a background of impenetrable green.

"A nice place for a picnic," the mate observed sarcastically.

"It's British soil, so I've read in the encyclopædia. So we shall have legal redress if we're interfered with," pointed out Thomas Todd.

The tramping of feet forward sent them scurrying to shelter behind the sodden cushions. Mr. Bidgood sought refuge at the back of the companion, where he occupied the time by levelling his rifle quickly at the tops of the ventilators for the sake of practice. He was thus employed when Helen came running up the stairs.

"Mary's not feeling very bright or I should have been up before," she said, and then enquired what he was doing.

"Getting my hand in," explained Mr. Bidgood. "From the noise they're making they may come any time."

"Why did you not call me?" she asked.

Mr. Bidgood said fiercely that he did not think it was necessary, as three Britishers were a match for a dozen dagos. In his sky-blue uniform he looked very warlike. There was a savage expression on his face that boded ill for his enemies; an expression which became intensified when Helen pointed out that the rifle he held was not yet cocked.

"Oh, Heavens!" he heard her exclaim, as she slipped

by him on to the deck. It was a remark that seemed to reflect on his efficiency.

She stood in the sunlight looking about her anxiously for a marvel of freshness in spite of the discomfort in which she had spent the night. The growing breeze caught her yellow hair and blew a strand or so about her forehead. She raised a hand mechanically, and smoothed them into place. Her neat looks at the moment left Mr. Bidgood cold, and yet he could not help eyeing her with very great respect. Brain in a woman was, in his opinion, misplaced in the wrong place, a terrible inconvenience to the man who had not any. But on an occasion like the present a little cleverness was entirely allowable, nay, even desirable. All of them were doing their little bit ; he giving freely of his knowledge of engines, she of her knowledge of gunnery. He felt irritated, of course, that she had found his revolver uncocked, but, as he reflected, a man cannot know everything, and he would have felt still more irritated had she beastly thing refused to go off when required. A little comfort came to him when she went forward and gave him the mate her opinion about the miserable state of the defences. After all, he suffered in good company.

The owner was now in trouble. Something about his rifle seemed to meet with her disapproval, and she took it from him and snapped open the breech. This picture of her, pale faced and white frocked, as she handled the dazzling weapon, came back to Mr. Bidgood often in the years that followed. Except as an illustration in the *Police Gazette*, he had never seen the like before. His tendency afterwards was to fit every revolver-flourishing lady who figured in this favourite journal of his with a halo. When Helen had put the matter right, she sat down on the deck beside Thomas Todd and sent for more cushions. Mr. Bidgood lent a hand to bring them up from the saloon.

"What's all the excitement about?" he enquired of the mate, as they ran down the stairs together. "There's no hurry."

"Yes, there is," the mate panted. "They're going to attack us! You couldn't see from where you were standing. But they're moving all the barrels out of reach so that we can't fire on them."

"The rats!" exclaimed Mr. Bidgood, frantically grabbing another cushion.

His calmness in an emergency, true to its habit, began to desert him, and every minute added to his perturbation. During the rough weather on the previous day an attack had seemed so improbable that he had contemplated it with a certain amount of equanimity. But now that the climax seemed almost upon them, his heart again began to trouble him. He seized his rifle with a trembling hand, and at Helen's direction sank into a position in the firing line next to the mate.

The sun, now half-way up the sky, beat upon the *Susan Dale* in a sort of placid fury, sucking up every drop of moisture from her decks and awnings, and changing the hue of the tarpaulin on the hatches to its customary dull brown. The day would have promised to be a hot one were it not for the fact that low down on the horizon a bank of black clouds had already begun to steal over the sky, driven forward by the rapidly strengthening breeze. Moreover, the sea, which at dawn was on the way to be a mill-pond, now shewed signs of reverting to its condition of the previous day, and waves once content to lap feebly at the stern were now beginning to break about it with a gentle roar. That the mutineers still held to the hope of getting the vessel afloat again was proved by the thin wreath of smoke that had issued from the funnel since early morning. Steam, as Mr. Bidgood noticed, was still up in the boilers, and he lay on the deck expecting to

hear the engines start at any time. When they did it was with a vigour that disgusted him professionally. No engineer worthy of the name would have handled engines so roughly as these were being handled. As he listened to their violent knocking he felt a strong desire to go below and ask Evans what he thought he was doing. And his helplessness against the desecration was not the least of the circumstances that conspired to raise in him an almost unbearable agitation during the next hour.

The engines revolved for some fifteen minutes with a madness which suggested suicide, the propeller roared like a muffled lion, the steering chains rattled violently, the *Susan Dale* trembled from stem to stern. No iron bolts might have held her, for not an inch did she budge from the shoal of sand that had taken her to its bosom in the early hours of the morning.

"They'll never get her off with the wind as it is," observed the mate, who was lying next to him. This seemed to be the opinion of the mutineers also, for when the engines stopped, as they did a moment later, there was no further attempt made to float the vessel. She lay there to all intents and purposes a captive of the sea, and it shewed signs of rising and devouring her as time wore on.

Black clouds gathered in the sky, threatening the sun, whose fiery rays seemed to have taken on a hint of sombreness. The waves were becoming storm-capped now, and on their way to become formidable. They broke over the stern with a roar and raced along the vessel's side, their tops almost level with the gunwale.

"I wish they'd come and get it over," said the mate in a strained whisper.

The clear, loud note of a bugle answered him, and once again, but this time rendered feebler by the wind, there floated aft the insistent sound of marching men.

A moment had come when the mind ceased to be conscious of extraneous matters, and concentrated itself with awful intensity on the business in front of it. For those four people lying behind the cushions on the poop the sun no longer beat down almost beyond the bearing point, the wind ceased, and there was no more sea. All they heard was the ring of the decks as the unseen body of men tramped aft; they only saw the wavering tips of their rifle barrels and the black, cavernous openings of the alley-ways from which at any instant now a stream of murderous devils might rush out and overwhelm them. Labouring hearts registered the dragging seconds. Trembling hands sought painfully to control the aim of the weapons held in them. And not a word spoke anyone, until at last the bugle rang out again, the sound of marching ceased, and from out of the porthole of the aftermost cabin in the starboard alley-way, there suddenly was thrust a white flag.

"Lord!" exclaimed the mate. "Another white flag!"

Mr. Bidgood emitted an enormous sigh, and began to breathe normally once more. Thomas Todd rose to his feet. Pale, ragged, and unshaven though he was, energy and some strange determination seemed to possess him. At that moment he had the figure of a hero.

"Come aft and say what you want to say," he cried in a harsh, strained voice. Mr. Bidgood saw Helen reach up, and, clasping his hand, try to pull him into shelter.

Colonel Tingle and Canaba promptly appeared at the entrance of the alley-way, and walked towards them. They were both of them in uniform, and the colonel in particular appeared as if depressed by the stirring times he was passing through. It was he, as usual, who spoke.

"Do you surrender, or not?" he asked, in stern tones.

"We do not," answered Thomas Todd promptly.

"We can't hold our men any longer," said the colonel.

"If you don't hand over the picture we shall attack once, and your blood be on your own heads."

"What terms do you offer?"

"I think we shall be able to guarantee your safety," replied Tingle uneasily, after a short consultation with Canaba. "But I don't promise anything." It was to the meanest intelligence among them that he had confidence in what he was saying. Indeed, he scarcely attempted to conceal the fact. Nevertheless, Thomas Todd stooped and whispered to Helen. She shook her head vigorously, and then turned to Mr. Bidgood.

"We rely on you," she hissed. "Everything depends on you. Sell your life as dearly as possible, but don't give up the picture."

Mr. Bidgood nodded dismally.

"We won't surrender," cried Thomas Todd.

"Then sound the attack. Don't waste any more time," called out Canaba.

The owner allowed Helen to pull him down into shelter. Mr. Bidgood heard her whisper. Something very endearing it sounded. He heard the owner's almost incoherent reply. On his other side the mate was babbling furiously about nothing, so it seemed to him. Plainly they had given up all hope, and so, for the matter of fact, had he, for even his engineering training in dealing with emergencies was proving useless at that desperate moment, leaving him helpless as the rest of them. His brain was now verging on lunacy, and under the wild governance of instinct. It was not even instinct, though, but some irresistible force coming from outside, so he always said, that swayed him to his feet and made him leap the rail and rush toward the alley-way. No power within could ever have so exalted him. He was a puppet, jerked hither and thither over the deck at the end of a string that was held by Fate.

It was Fate, so he told them afterwards, that made

him dash into the alley-way and hit the astonished Tingle fair and square in the face. It was Fate that filled his foes with consternation, and then directed him to plunge his hand into his garments, tear out a folded piece of canvas, and flourish it in the air.

"If you want your dratted picture come and take it," he yelled, as he danced up and down in front of them. And when they rushed at him he threw it over the side, and two of the foremost of them after it.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN the *mêlée* that followed, Mr. Bidgood must have borne a charmed life. Chinese firemen, so tells the story, rushed at him from every point of the compass, all of them yelling diabolically, all of them intent on revenge. The number of grinning faces he remembered having seen and hit during so many ten seconds increased with the passing years until the figure reached was almost past belief. He would have been torn limb from limb, he says, but for the fact that he seized a flying pigtail and, whirling the man at the end of it round his head, cleared a passage for himself. Neither party was able to fire because of the danger of hitting their friends.

How long the fight lasted he does not know. But this much is certain : never was a completer victory won. He cooled down to find himself standing against the port bulkhead with the end of a pigtail clasped tight in his hand and the deck bare of his enemies. The last of them was yet visible, running up the ladder to the bridge deck and still yelling hideously. "Come up ! Come up, Mr. Bidgood," his friends cried to him from above. William's hands were stretched out to help him, but he waved them away and ascended to the poop by the bulwarks.

"You brave man !" cried Helen, almost embracing him. And the rest of them acted in more or less the same manner. They meant to be very flattering, no doubt, but

of course he was a brave man, and although they might be surprised at the fact there was no need to shew they were.

"You've saved our lives," burst out Helen, almost crying with the relief of emotions long restrained.

"For the second time," said Thomas Todd, in a cracked, excited voice, as he shook his hand again.

What with Mary hanging on to one arm, and Suliemina on to the other, and the mate patting his back, and the ancient Malay clinging to his knees, he was growing rather embarrassed. He struggled, panting, to a seat, and sank into it, overcome with a temporary faintness, the result of his late exertions.

"How have I saved your lives?" he asked at last, in a weak voice.

"How?" exclaimed the mate. "Turn and see. Can't you hear the noise?"

Without attempting to rise, Mr. Bidgood faced the bows and looked in the direction indicated by his shipmate's outstretched hand. Some two hundred yards nearer the shore, tossed about and lashed with spray in the middle of the broken sea, lay one of the ship's boats. Her head was turned towards the ship and the five men in her were rowing desperately, yet even as Mr. Bidgood looked she drifted farther away, helpless against the combined force of wind and wave.

"Canaba and two of the Spaniards are in that boat," explained Helen, in a breathless voice. "They went to save the picture you threw overboard, and they can't get back. Mr. Dixon says they never will."

"Never," said the mate, with great satisfaction.

"When the Chinamen heard the boat being lowered," Helen continued, "they must have thought the ship was sinking, too, for they all shrieked and, leaving you, rushed forward. They've got another boat down. In fact, a

panic has seized the whole crew. Hear them yelling a lot of fiends ! ”

“ You can see everything from here,” cried Mary, had run to the corner of the poop. “ Oh, poor Col Tingle ! ”

“ What is it ? ” asked Thomas Todd, rushing off to join her.

“ He was trying to keep them back from a boat, an awful Chinaman got behind him and pushed him over. He picked himself up, and shouted, and drew his sword, and then another of those dreadful creatures threw an empty beer bottle, and it knocked him down again. He is lying in the scupper with his half-caste servant bending over him.”

“ And they’re lowering another boat ! ” cried the man.
“ Well, a good riddance, whatever happens.”

“ Yes, but what about us if we want to leave ourselves ? ” asked Thomas Todd. “ Tell me that. There’s only one boat left now.”

“ You take my tip and stick to the ship,” said the man.
“ This wind won’t last for ever.”

“ Look, the second boat is clear of the ship ! ” Mary cried. “ Packed with firemen and sailors ! What a wave ! I’m sure they will sink—I’m sure they will sink ! ”

“ Is there any sign of Evans aboard of her ? ” enquired Mr. Bidgood, from his seat over against the skylight.

“ I don’t see him,” Mary answered. “ One of the Europeans is in the boat.” She turned again and looked intently. “ Oh—I’m not sure ! Who is that in a straw hat sitting near the stern ? ”

“ How is he dressed ? ” Mr. Bidgood asked impatiently.

“ In a hideous coloured blazer, half green, half yellow.”

“ There is only one man outside of England with a coat like that,” muttered Mr. Bidgood. “ What is he doing ? ” he asked.

"Nothing."

"That's Evans, right enough," Mr. Bidgood said. "I knew the sort he was long ago," he cried indignantly. "He's not one of us. We want nothing to do with him. A blackleg! A disgraceful reptile! Don't you go judging what engineers are like by him, Miss Clatworthy. The runaway skunk! He might have let old Skinner go first, anyhow!"

"The other boat has now left the side," Mary told him. "No, she hasn't. Oh . . . Oh! She dashed against it, but they've pushed her off! She's gone out of sight somewhere round the front of the ship! Oh, I can't look any longer! They may all get drowned!"

But Mr. Bidgood, aroused from his temporary weakness of body by the shock of the second's desertion, was feeling entirely equal to looking for himself. The first object that met his view when he arose and stepped to the rail was the third boat lying broadside on in the trough of the sea, with a tangled mass of natives in her, some of whom were struggling to get out the heavy oars. On the stretch of water ahead both the other boats were visible, steering a drunken course towards the shore, where yellow breakers foamed against a yellow beach.

Clouds fled across the sky. Cloud-shadows chased the waves across the sea. But although the sun still shone obstinately the breeze was freshening every minute, and the force of the waves on the *Susan Dale* by no means tended to decrease. The vibration of the stern as they battered against it was growing more and more insistent, and even as Mr. Bidgood joined the others at the rail a heavy body of water leapt the gunwale, and, spreading in the air like a parachute, plopped with a dull sound upon the deck.

"What a horrible wave," said Mary. "Is it going to be rough?"

"Not very, perhaps," said the mate, turning to look out to sea, but Thomas Todd, studying his face, found very little in its expression to reassure him.

"Now, Mr. Dixon, tell me; don't you think we ought to make for the land, too?" he asked again, in a tone which he strove vainly to render unconcerned.

"And be at the mercy of those people?" cried Helen indignantly. "Most certainly not. I'd rather die."

That was the answer she gave Tingle when a little later he picked himself up from the scupper and ran aft, looking thoroughly frightened, to interview them.

"I have not time to argue!" he shouted in return, dancing in agitation. "The last boat leaves in two minutes. Come, if you want to. It is suicide to remain here. Skinner says so."

"We're not going—that is, just now," Thomas Todd answered.

"You always were an obstinate fool. Drown and be damned to you!" he shrieked, and turning, ran forward. A heavy wave caught him in his passage along the lower deck and knocked him sprawling. They heard his high-pitched curses as he picked himself up and scrambled towards the boat, about which a few excited Malays were dancing attendance. They saw Skinner and Bunn dash from the alley-way, and ascend to the upper deck carrying armfuls of clothes, obviously snatched blindly from the cabins in the hurry of departure. The boat was already swung out on its davits, and after a moment's turmoil the whole party threw themselves aboard and began to lower away at the blocks. The tops of the waves slashed forcefully against her underside while she descended, sending out fountains of spray.

"If they miss unhooking they're done for," cried the mate, watching her descent critically. But the Malays

at her bow and stern drew the pins on the instant, and she floated free.

"Good-bye, Todd," howled Tingle, with an assumption of being at his ease, as the boat floated by. "You'll never see Peckham again. Ah, you didn't think I knew!"

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye," shouted the mate. "I hope you'll like Borneo."

"What do you mean by Borneo?" yelled Tingle. They saw him bend down hastily and consult with Bunn. "Bunn is quite certain it's the Philippines," he shrieked. "He knows the coast well."

"All right," shouted the mate.

"I'm certain it's the Philippines," shrieked Tingle, in great excitement. "It is the Philippines, I'm certain," he shrieked again.

And as the boat receded towards the shore he was still to be seen engaged in excited colloquy with Bunn.

Those on the wind-swept poop must have stood for nearly five minutes watching her, in spite of their own hazardous position.

Some of them, if Mr. Bidgood understood their conversation aright, even hoped that she would reach the shore safely. Well, so, for that matter, did he, Mr. Bidgood, when he came to consider it. There were head-hunters ashore there. He hoped their knives would be blunt. "A bloodthirsty ruffian, so he is," he growled, looking after the boat with the others.

"Captain Porter!" said Helen suddenly. "We've forgotten all about the captain!"

It was Mr. Bidgood who found him locked away in an empty cabin near the mess-room, and bursting with a desire to be revenged on somebody.

"But it's not my fault," explained Mr. Bidgood, having

listened for some time to the torrent of abuse that sprang from the captain's lips, and detected therein a tendency towards blaming him.

"I'm not so sure about that," grumbled the captain, looking intensely suspicious. He led the way aft, listening with obvious impatience to Mr. Bidgood's confused recital of his adventures since they parted in the engine-room, and took the first opportunity of telling the owner that he was surprised at any of the party being alive at all. He seemed beside himself with bitterness.

"There's been a gross neglect of duty somewhere, probably in the engineer's department, as usual," was the opinion he expressed.

Tears came into Mr. Bidgood's eyes at this evidence of continued enmity on the part of his old friend.

"Where has there been a neglect of duty?" he asked.

"Have you sounded your tanks, have you pumped out your bilges, have you looked at the water in the boilers?" enquired the captain savagely.

Mr. Bidgood confessed that he had not.

"Too busy making hay while the sun shines, I'll be bound," the captain said, with a wild laugh.

"While what?" asked Mr. Bidgood, much surprised.

"While I was away," explained the captain darkly.

"Down in the mess-room among the lockers. That's where you've been busy."

"I've been doing no such thing," declared Mr. Bidgood in indignant tones. "There's two dozen left. If you don't believe it, you can go and count 'em for yourself." He had never seen his old friend in such a state of rage. It was unaccountable, devastating.

"I want none of your innocent looks," shouted the captain. "You know what I'm referring to."

If it was not the ale Mr. Bidgood had not the foggiest idea, and as for innocent looks, he would have scorned

to offer such things, even had he possessed them. He said as much to the company, but they maintained a scared silence.

"Are you going about your duties or are you not?" roared the captain. "I want no palaver from anyone."

Mr. Bidgood, in his extreme indignation at being accused of something so indefinite that he was unable to deny it, might have been led into a mutinous reply had not the owner sprung forward and taken his arm.

"Don't quarrel! I entreat you, don't quarrel!" said Mr. Todd, in a voice as he dragged him away. "The captain is evidently unstrung in a most extraordinary manner by his confinement."

"What, dotty?" asked Mr. Bidgood, in an awed whisper.

"Something of the sort, I'm afraid. We must humour him. Anything rather than unpleasantness between us at such a time as this."

So Mr. Bidgood, after throwing a frightened glance over his shoulder at his superior, and receiving in return a look that seemed amply to confirm the owner's fears, clambered down by the bulwarks and made his way forward with as much speed as the waves, which were now constantly invading the ship, allowed him to.

They were terrible waves, now, monster billows that rolled in from the ocean with a grand air of irresistibility, yet the *Susan Dale*, although she trembled from stem to stern at the shock of their charge, still bore up like a rock, her side-ports opening and shutting as they freed her flooded decks, her belaboured hatches so far intact. The alley-ways were all awash, but as yet no water had penetrated the engine-room, except that a little spray was now blowing in at intervals through the skylight and wetting the gratings and the tops of the machinery.

With a certain amount of satisfaction Mr. Bidgood

noticed that, where drops of this spray fell on the cylinder covers, white marks quickly made their appearance. Enough steam yet remained about his engine to evaporate a drop of water, and while there was some there was hope.

Not that he would have given much for the chance of the poor old *Susan Dale* wriggling out of her present position. The sand seemed to have too close a grip on her, the waves and wind too great a force, for such an occurrence to appear inside the bounds of probability.

But, with a little steam, bilges might be pumped out, leaks might be combated; in fact, an effort might be made to stave off the fate which was plainly approaching them, and which, strive as he would, he could not entirely avoid contemplating.

Once or twice, when he had looked at the boiling sea that day, he had wondered gloomily what sort of a figure he would cut clinging to a broken spar in the middle of that turmoil, fighting for his life with one arm and trying to rescue the ladies with the other. The memory of a picture he had seen in a paper a few weeks before—a man on a lonely beach lying clinging to something which he looked like a small barrel, but had proved on examination to be a pet lap dog of some sort or other—a picture entitled "Even in death they were not divided"—had been particularly obtrusive, causing him to gulp and turn his head even when time he caught sight of the shore. But buried in the engine room, where steel walls shut out unpleasant visions as the sand hides an ostrich from its enemies, Mr. Bidgood began to feel a little more like himself.

There was a familiar oily smell about the place, homely like fried fish, yet more delicious to him than the scent of flowers. He paused for a moment, breathing through his nose, and then turning, descended to the platform with his face towards the ladder and a hand firmly grasping either

rail. Spots of rust had invaded these rails, as they had the remainder of the polished work ; but his engines, so far as a first glance informed him, were much in the same condition as before.

It was hours since he and they had been parted, hours that seemed like weeks. He had expected to find his old friends altered, bearing some signs of the ill usage they had suffered in his absence. A nut missing here, a guide face scored there, or perhaps the white metal run out of some gland-packing or other. But a close inspection of the front of them—and he went round with a lamp in his hand, as alert and suspicious as a general on night duty—failed to reveal anything to which he could take the slightest exception. They were very still and stolid, so still, in fact, that, when the dull sound of the waves beating outside ceased once and again, he could hear, as at a microphone, the slight swish of water in the bilges, and the tap-tap on the iron platform plates as condensed steam dripped from leaky joints.

Now that the temperature of the engine-room had lessened there was an ooze of water everywhere, wetting the floor as though a fine rain had fallen, covering the iron skin of the vessel with a multitude of tiny drops that glittered as the light from his lamp passed over them. The tunnel walls dripped like a cave, and like a cave they loudly echoed the sound of his every movement. In that low and narrow passage, seemingly endless, insulated from the noise of the world by a double thickness of iron and many feet of cargo, with dark shadows fleeing before the light of the lamp and following hard behind, alert, intangible, threatening, a spectre army, fear suddenly attacked him. He stood for a moment in its icy grip, and then, whistling loudly, went on.

It occurred to him very pressingly that should the sea break in here he would be drowned like a rat. At the idea

he broke into a run, still whistling spasmodically, and reaching the tunnel end, seized a spanner hanging on the rusty bulkhead and screwed madly at the nuts of the stern gland in order to keep back the water that spurting in from the sea. A fountain played around him, breaking into spray on the slimy iron walls, on the rusty ceiling, on the slippery planks of the floor. In a moment or so he was drenched. But he worked on hurriedly, plying his spanner first on one side and then on another, driving home the gland until the spout became a trickle, and the trickle became a mere drip. And then the lamp spluttered and went out.

With the sudden darkness fear took full possession of him. He dropped his tool hastily, and made an urgent movement to retreat. But at almost the first step he slipped, and with a hoarse cry, a blind clutch at the slithery, oozy walls, the smooth shaft, the empty blackness, he fell heavily among the jagged iron beneath the tunnel floor.

And somewhere behind the curtain of grey cloud that was gathering over the waste of tossing waters and the battered ship, the sun in undimmed splendour mounted to the zenith, and began its slow descent.

CHAPTER XXV

IN ignorance of the awful suspicion that hung about him, a suspicion that made the muscles of the owner and the mate grow tense at his approach, and the hearts of the two girls bound with relief as he retreated, Captain Porter, active and alert, and with a three days' growth upon his chin, disappeared into the saloon for a few minutes, and on coming up again, paced the poop, stamping his feet as though on every plank there lay an enemy.

A continuous rain of spray and scud flew across the deck, yet he seemed unconscious of the fact; the sea roared and roared again, but no keeper at the Zoo could have been more unconcerned at the noise than he. There was an expression of rage in his face that all the elements combined were unable to rival. And when he cleared his throat, he did so in such a savage manner that the little group, cowering under the lee of the companion, felt that they infinitely preferred the noise of the howling wind.

"You see how we're landed through him," he shouted at last, standing in a fierce attitude opposite them.

"Yes, yes, captain," said Thomas Todd soothingly. "Quite so."

"I don't know that it was carelessness," said the captain. "Not at all." He walked up and down again and their eyes grew strained in watching him. "He planned the whole thing; I see it all now. . . . He must have

arranged with the second engineer to have me locked he cried, and shook his fist like a madman.

"Certainly, certainly, I quite agree with you, my captain," returned Thomas Todd instantly.

"I knew you would. He was bound to be caught last, the slimy son of a gun. It's been preying on my nerves for the past three days," he said in a hoarse whisper, approaching them. "Kept me from eating, kept me from sleeping. His damnable cunningness is what beats me. I never thought he had it in him."

"Very true," said Thomas Todd, shrinking involuntarily from the threatening fist. "Very true."

"Do you know anything about it?" shouted the captain, turning on the mate.

"No, sir, I don't," replied Dixon hurriedly.

"All the better for you," growled the captain, resuming his promenade. "I'll have it out of him before the day is ended," they heard him mutter as he passed them again, as fierce and restless as ever.

"What is he talking about?" asked Mary in a frightened whisper.

"Hush," murmured Helen. "He'll tire himself out before long," she muttered to Thomas Todd. "They always do after a time, and then as a rule fall down utterly done up. I've nursed several cases like this. The greatest thing is not to cross them."

"Can't we do anything for the poor fellow?" asked Thomas Todd unsteadily.

"Later, later," she told him. "It would be dangerous to interfere now."

He thought her look of pity was meant for him, and squeezed the hand that lay so close to his.

"Oh, don't think of such things now," she breathed, "surrounded as we are by danger and distress."

He knew that she took the correct view of the matter,

but could not help feeling a shade hurt. It pained him to have done the wrong thing. The mate and Mary sitting close together at his side were very quiet. Considering the distress and danger, they did not look particularly unhappy. Once he thought he heard Mary utter an exclamation, but her face when she turned was perfectly expressionless.

"I have some medicine for the captain in the cabin," Helen whispered after a while. "One of my rules is never to travel without certain drugs."

"Really? How admirable," said he. "What medicine is it?"

"An opiate, something to make him sleep. He'll complain of thirst soon. They always do. Wait, and you'll see."

Encouraged by the news, Thomas Todd waited patiently and watched intently. Signs of fatigue did become visible in the captain after a time. He walked with a shorter stride and at a slower pace, and his expression of ferocity somewhat abated in intensity. Helen's prophecy regarding the course which the illness would take shewed ample indications of being correct.

Evidently she was as skilled in her profession as she was admirable in the ordinary affairs of life. "A wonderful woman," Thomas Todd thought, looking at her out of the corner of his eye. "Dear me; I'm sure my mother would have approved of her. So efficient, so very efficient!"

She seemed now to have forgotten her surroundings, forgotten the fact that he sat beside her, so intensely was she absorbed apparently in this prospective patient. Her fine, determined face almost shone as she followed the captain's movements and listened to the gruff exclamations he let fall from time to time. Her eyes were at once calm, and pitying, and full of a fixed resolve. When at last she put a hand on Thomas Todd, he felt no sense of elation at

the act, but knew that for the moment he might consider himself a piece of furniture, such as the arm of a hostess chair.

"Now!" she whispered.

The captain had stopped and was looking at her meditatively. "What about a bottle of beer?" he enquired.

"Quite so," said Thomas Todd at random. She was marvellous.

"Say you'll have one! Say I'll have one," she ordered in an intense whisper.

Thomas Todd did so, and followed the pair into the overheated saloon, where he foraged for beer, while the captain, seated on a locker, stared around in a mad, suspicious way, and abused the weather. "But it's just about blown itself out," he concluded.

Thomas Todd paused in the act of uncorking a bottle and agreed.

"Er, sometimes the weather is fine, captain," he added, making conversation, "and sometimes—er—it is not. Even a lunatic, he reflected, could hardly be offended at a remark like that.

"But we don't mind what weather we have so long as you're here, Captain Porter," said Helen, smiling confidently. The captain's suspicious glance fell on her. She rose again with another quick smile at the owner, crept through the hole in the bulk head.

"How did that get there?" he asked, pointing with his glass.

Thomas Todd explained that Mr. Bidgood cut it.

The very name seemed to be enough. "He's spoiled the ship," declared the captain, putting his glass on the table with a thump. "The Board of Trade 'll never pass it. Carving holes in this, that, and the other. Why don't you carve one in the side?" he demanded, with fierce sarcasm.

Thomas Todd, in a voice which he tried in vain to control, said soothingly that he did not know one was necessary, but that, if the captain wished to have one made, it should be made.

"What?" shouted the captain. "Want one? You must take me for a fool."

"Nonsense," cried Helen, in a cheerful voice. "Don't get such stupid ideas into your head, captain." She appeared at the opening for an instant and nodded encouragingly at Thomas Todd.

"Dear me, no!" cried Thomas Todd in haste. "I should never consider the idea! I really think you're extremely clever, yes, extraordinarily clever."

"Ho!" said Captain Porter.

"I've never met your equal, no, when I come to consider it I don't think I have. The most wonderful cleverness, and—er—brain power—marvellous!"

"Now see, Mr. Todd," said the captain, looking extremely suspicious. "You're the owner, but, all the same, I don't like my leg pulled."

"I mean it," said Thomas Todd desperately. "I can assure you, I mean it."

"You're pulling my leg," observed the captain, with a savage look.

"No, he isn't. Don't be stupid," cried out Helen. She came out of the cabin and passed between the captain and the table. "Excuse me," she said coolly.

Thomas Todd held his breath as he watched her. Pausing for a second right in front of the captain, she poured the contents of a small medicine bottle into the unfinished beer. Horrible!

"It's a tight fit," remarked the captain, who had been leaning back in his seat to let her by him.

"Very tight," she returned, in bright, matter-of-fact tones. The look of innocence she wore was so natural that

Thomas Todd felt an awful qualm arise within him. too, was a beer-drinker.

"Talking of being tight," continued Captain P. reminiscently, "reminds me of a certain chief engineer of our acquaintance, who's never happy unless he is. wouldn't believe the trouble I've had with that class of public-houses, Mr. Todd."

"Often?" asked Helen.

"Almost daily," replied the captain.

"I can well understand that," said Thomas Todd in a trembling voice.

"What?" asked the captain suspiciously.

"The trouble you have when you are in public-houses with Mr. Bidgood," faltered Thomas Todd.

"Not when I'm in," corrected the captain, in some impatience. "When he's in."

"I understand," said Thomas Todd, nodding his head several times. He pulled out a handkerchief and began rubbing his eyeglasses nervously.

"I only go in to pull him out," added the captain, determined there should be no mistake.

"Of course! Of course!" exclaimed his listeners both together.

The captain looked at them out of his little blue eyes with intense suspicion. "Of course," he agreed doubtfully.

"Too much drink is an awful thing," said Helen.

"Not that there's anything wrong with a little beer in the right place," continued the captain, as if determined not to play their game, whatever it was. He raised his glass and emptied it almost with an air of defiance.

"The right place. Ha, ha!" exclaimed Thomas Todd, laughing horribly. "An excellent joke."

"Excellent," echoed Helen.

The captain gave them both a hard, considering stare.

"Glass and glass about is what I believe in," he remarked cunningly, after a while. "When I'm drinking with a fellow I don't like to see him get ahead of me, and I don't like to see myself get ahead of him. Shall we drink up and have another?"

The haste with which both of them proceeded to carry out his wishes would have aroused suspicion in the most trusting bosom. The captain looked from one to the other very sharply, and then leant back against the wall, his brow corrugated, his eyes puzzled, evidently deep in thought. He kept very still. After a time he lifted his glass from the table and sniffed at the dregs. The result seemed satisfactory. "Was yours all right?" he enquired.

"Very good indeed," replied Helen.

"Mine was a bit flat," the captain told them. "I had kept it standing too long, maybe. Great mistake to keep beer standing too long—a great mistake. We'll have another," he added, rousing himself.

"Er—certainly," said Thomas Todd.

"I haven't had any sleep for three nights," went on the captain. "I shall be—the better of another glass of beer." He looked round and saw Helen shaking her head vigorously. "We'll have another," he said again, in drowsy but determined tones.

"He mustn't," whispered Helen peremptorily.

"Will you open 'nother, Mr. Todd, or shall I—awright, I——" He rose and fell back into his seat again. "Why—don't you—open 'nother?"

"Because you're very ill," Helen replied, in her best professional manner. "Because you've got to go to sleep like a good boy."

"What?" said the captain, waking up a little. "What do you mean? I insist on—having 'nother. I—insist."

"He's going off," muttered Helen to Thomas Todd.

"Get his pyjamas. You'll find a bundle of his t under the berth in the cabin. I put them there for saf And as the owner disappeared she loosened her pat collarband, and then began to take off his coat. In trained hands he made but little resistance, asto ment and the drug combining, seemingly, to render helpless.

"What are you doing?" he growled, trying feebl push her away. His eyes closed.

"There, there," said Helen, pulling off the coat. "Y be better soon."

"You put something—in the beer," muttered captain, half opening one eye.

"Nonsense," said Helen, with a smile.

"What you—do it for?" enquired the captain, tr hard to open the other eye. Thomas Todd came b

"Can you find a jacket?" asked Helen, with her round the captain's neck. "Be quick. I can't hold up long."

"I believe this is one," said Thomas Todd, pul hastily at the bundle. A small cash-box rolled out of off the table, and on to the captain's lap. The capt making a last effort, opened the other eye and saw it. made to rise.

"Call Bidgood," he cried in a loud voice; and then back in their arms unconscious.

They drew the pyjam. jacket on, and laid him out length, putting the bundle under his head.

"This is awful," said Thomas Todd, in an anxious voi "Poor fellow! Will he get better?"

"Sleep sometimes works wonders," said Helen. S began to tidy up the saloon.

"I don't like his breathing," remarked Thomas Tod listening.

"That's the noise they always make," Helen assur

him. "He's a big man, but I've given him a good dose. This sleep will last for about twelve hours."

She went to the cabin and brought back a blanket to put over her patient, who lay like a log, with his head thrown back and his mouth wide open, snoring loudly.

"You needn't feel alarmed," she said. "I know what I'm about."

"I know it's all for the best," said Thomas Todd doubtfully. "But— Poor fellow, poor fellow !"

"Do you think I liked doing it ?" she asked.

"Oh no, of course not. Certainly not !"

"Well, what then ?" She came and sat down near him. "You know it was a merciful thing to do, don't you ?"

"Most certainly," he said, in a troubled voice. "But are you sure he'll waken ?"

"Of course," she answered. "What makes you think those things ? You must be unstrung. . . . Your expression quite worries me."

"Oh, I'm all right," he said, with a sickly smile.

"Thomas," she said eagerly, laying a hand on his shoulder.

"Yes ?" He ought to have thrilled at her touch like an electric bell, but he did not.

"You're ill, Thomas. You yourself are overwrought."

"No, no !"

"Yes, you are. Do you think I can't tell ? You want sleep. You must sleep. Let me give you a dose, too. There's plenty of it."

"On no account whatever !" he said in a horrified voice. "It's the air down here," he went on. "So stuffy—I'll go on deck." He rose hurriedly, and left her sitting there, with a look of irritation and astonishment on her face.

"Hang the man!" she muttered viciously at length and rising, flung the blanket over the sleeping captain.

Meanwhile Thomas Todd had gained the top of the stairway, and stood with his head poked out of the entrance breathing in the strong salt breeze.

During his absence in the saloon the weather had changed. The sun now shone through a big rift in the clouds, giving the once gloomy waters a yellow, cheerful appearance reminiscent of weak tea. Foam still capped the waves, but it was a pleasant, jocular sort of foam, and even the line of breakers beating on the sandy flank of a cape that jutted out into the sea half-way across his circle of vision had nothing menacing about them. So hopeful was the garb of everything that had a canary burst into song that the manifestation would have seemed entirely natural.

Consequently, when he heard Mary giggle on the other side of the partition he was not surprised a little bit.

"Oh no—no, no!" said Mary, in a soft voice.

"But, I say," protested the mate.

"There's no thunder about now," said Mary.

"I wish there was."

"You're a cruel man to wish a thing like that."

"I'm not." From the tone of his voice it seemed as if he were pleased she thought him so.

"I don't want anything more to do with you—no—no."

"Tut, tut! Dear me," muttered Thomas Todd. "I should never have thought it of Dixon. Such a nice, quiet, unassuming fellow, too. Well, well. But what can I see in him? I suppose it must be animal magnetism. I must look it up in my encyclopædia."

They were evidently still sitting with their backs against the partition, for it creaked slightly.

"I say—won't you call me Jack?" asked the mate passionately.

"Why should I?" said Mary in a faint voice. The partition creaked again. "Very well then—since you make me——"

Thomas Todd continued to stand irresolute, half on the deck and half on the stairs. "I wonder if I ought to cough and let them know I'm here," he muttered. But if he coughed it would disturb them, and they would not like that. On the other hand, if he did not, he would have to go back to the saloon, and he was sure he did not want that, or otherwise why did he leave it? He could not stay where he was for ever, although it was very pleasant there in the sun and warmth and brightness. Spring was in the air, that was it. That accounted for those two on the other side of the partition. No, they didn't want him. And yet if he went below again, only one thing could happen. Why shouldn't it happen? There was an idea to play with! He—Thomas Todd! What would his business friends think? And what would she say? Oh, well! Dear me!

Yet he was shivering a little as he stole down the stairs. A delicious shiver! He knew his mother would approve of her.

She was sitting just where he had left her, with her head on one hand and her eyes staring into vacancy, and did not apparently hear his approach. About the saloon there seemed to hang a smell of good works. The captain slept peacefully as might a man on Sunday afternoon. A healthy flush on his face indicated that the soul had not the slightest intention of fleeing, although the noise of the snoring would have been quite sufficient excuse for it to do so. All the beer had gone, doubtless cleared away by her dainty fingers. A text on the wall, and the picture would have been complete. That was the atmosphere she spread about her. What a contrast to Miss Amerton, who

always shocked his prejudices by reminding him cigarette advertisement.

"Miss Clatworthy," he said.

"Well?" she replied, without turning.

"I—I've come back," said Thomas Todd.

"You'll have it then, after all," she said. "I'll go for you now." Rising with alacrity, she made to enter the cabin.

"I don't want the medicine," said Thomas Todd, with great determination.

"What then?" she asked, retiring a pace.

"You know how alone and unsupported I am. You know—er—how I want something to cling to. Have I told you before? Twice now! You know what my feelings are."

She faced him, her cheeks aflush, and her eyes sought his as they had done many times before, and looked through and through.

"Well, I'm waiting," she said in a suppressed voice. "You must ask! Really, Thomas, you can't go about asking to be allowed to cling to people without. You must see that."

He gazed at her in astonishment, and then her meaning dawned on him. "I'm very sorry. I quite forgot. Will you marry me, Miss Clatworthy—Helen?" he enquired.

"I will, Thomas," she said with decision.

He embraced her automatically.

A terrific snort from the captain broke them apart. They scanned each other, looking slightly scared, and rather ashamed of themselves.

"Do you know, Thomas," said Helen, "I thought you would never ask me?"

He told her that he had been waiting for a chance ever since he had met her. "I respected you too much to hurry things," he added. "I thought it would be as well

for you to get to know me better. You see, I did not want you to make a hurried decision."

"On the very first day we became acquainted I knew you were the man—the one I wanted. 'The captive of my bow and spear,'" she added.

Thomas Todd said nothing, but squeezed her hand. It seemed to him rather an alarming way of putting it.

"We shall be very happy together," she went on. "I took a course of cookery lessons when in London."

He looked at her in silence, smiling nervously.

"We ought to be comfortable," she continued with enthusiasm. "Think of the good we shall be able to do together. Think of the work there is to be done, the work among the poor, the needy, the sick."

He did so without experiencing any marked exhilaration. Ah, she was a good woman, a capable woman !

"I do hope you will get on well with my mother," he remarked.

"I hope I shall," she said.

It must have been nearly five o'clock before conversation slackened. They made their way to the deck, and found Mary seated there alone. She told them the mate had just gone to look for Mr. Bidgood.

"The captain enquired for him," remarked Helen. "I intended to do so, too, but I forgot."

"I also," said Thomas Todd. "He should be quite safe. Don't you think so ?"

"I asked him if he couldn't wait till after lunch," said Mary, "but he said he didn't want any. I'm sure it must be lunch time," she added.

On their agreeing with her, she suggested that they should wait no longer for anybody. The three of them went down to the saloon and foraged round for food. And they ate, talking the while to the music of the captain's nose. Mary said she was certain no woman could live

with a man who snored like that, and advised Helen to make strict enquiries as to the nocturnal habits of any man who might propose to her. "If one does," she added mischievously.

"Someone already has," Helen told her with dignity. "Mr. Todd and I are engaged."

"Hurrah!" cried Mary excitedly, waving a hand. "There's nothing like perseverance! I mean, I hope to be happy!"

"I don't think you know what you do mean," Helen severely.

"It was a compliment to Mr. Todd," said Mary.

The meal proceeded more sedately after that. Thomas talked of the weather, of the danger of their position, of the difficulties ahead of them. Thomas Todd revealed himself as a pessimist of the worst description. Mary refused to listen to him, the mate having already assured her that when the weather abated it would not be the captain's fault if the ship remained aground.

"But Captain Porter is bad now," pointed out Helen.

"The captain is not everybody," said Thomas Todd, irritated.

"He's considered the most important person on the ship usually," returned Mary.

"He certainly is not on this ship," said Helen, in a sharp tone.

Mary looked from one to the other and laughed. "No," she said. "The owner's the goose—I mean the swan. His mate, of course, is a dear little duck."

"Don't talk foolishly," said Helen, most severely.

They finished the meal in silence, and were about to go on deck, when there was a clatter of feet on the stairs, and the mate burst in.

"I've searched for Bidgood everywhere, and I can't find him!" he said, almost in a whisper.

So serious was his demeanour that for a moment there was silence. Then they all began to talk together, raising questions on him, questions that grew in incoherency as their number multiplied. He must be on the ship? Where else could he possibly be? There was an answer to that, but if it occurred to them they did not dare to give it.

"I've searched the ship thoroughly," the mate said. "I've been into every possible nook and cranny; down the holds, through all the cabins, the forecastle, the bunkers, the engine-room, the tunnel, the stokehold. I've shouted his name. Loud, I shouted it. But he's not aboard. He's gone."

"Can he be in the lazarette?" asked Thomas Todd.

"No, I've looked."

"Perhaps he's in our cabin," suggested Mary, in a voice that indicated the near approach of tears.

But they found nobody there except the old Malay and his wife, who still sat crouched in the corner where Thomas Todd had discovered them.

Had some dreadful mishap befallen the chief engineer? Had a mighty wave, perhaps, sweeping over the deck, taken him unawares and washed him overboard? "Yes, he was a good swimmer," the mate told them, "and it was not impossible for him to have reached the land, unless a blow had stunned him." But the look on his face told them what he really thought about Mr. Bidgood's chance of doing this, and Mary burst into a flood of tears. They did not attempt to comfort her. They looked as though they had a hard task to restrain their own.

Almost at once the owner and the mate left to make another search. They came back after dusk, tired, unsuccessful, and beyond all words depressed.

"If we do get the ship off how can we manage now

Bidgood's gone?" the mate had asked hopelessly as returned.

"What do you mean?"

"None of us know about engines; not the first time," had replied the mate.

"Dear— Good God!" had said Thomas Todd.

And then, dark as a funeral, the night marched. Black clouds obscured the heavens, a grey mist held the sea, which, though the breeze had fallen, shewed no sign of lessened motion and never ceased its roar.

The news of their old comrade's untimely fate almost put an end to hope on board the ship. And there seemed to be a lack of spirit about the two men, although the mate did talk a good deal about rigging sails and making rafts, in a semi-cheerful sort of way.

Mary was very kind to him that evening. They sat together on the deck in pitchy darkness long after the others had retired. It took a long time to say "Good-night." It seemed as if he would never let her go. And then at last he almost pushed her down the stairs, and turned and walked hurriedly away.

"I wonder what he did that for," she thought, as she undressed. Tears rolled unnoticed down her cheeks, falling on her slim, bare arms. She began to plait her hair. "It couldn't be that . . . it would never be allowed that . . . would it, Mrs. Dixon?" she whispered brokenly to her mother. "You know . . . you can tell me different. . . photograph. Why do you look at me like that? And you smile sorrowfully! It isn't true, is it? . . . It can't be true. . . That he and I . . . just as we . . . and all our plans . . . be so happy! . . . And now . . . dead! Oh no, it would be unjust. . . . God would never allow that, I'm sure. He . . ."

She sank on her knees, sobs thrilling her, but very quiet. And as she did so, suddenly and like the rushing of wings

there came from all around a noise, a cheering noise, familiar and comforting as the roar of the traffic in the streets. The stern began to shake violently.

"Oh, Helen! Helen!" she cried. "The engines! The ship's moving! The ship's moving!"

CHAPTER XXVI

HAD Mr. Bidgood been a thinner man, had gentlemen who designed the *Susan Dale* the gentlemen who bent a certain angle iron again, the gentlemen who, during an interval between two strikes, riveted the triangular plate on that angle iron, performed their duties in such a manner to have caused the said triangular plate to be a quarter of an inch further aft, Mr. Bidgood's fate would have been very different. As things were, the cushion of flesh on the back of his neck, a buffer built of beefsteak, so to speak, broke his fall.

There he lay, lost to the world, surrounded by a total like darkness, and half immersed in a slimy pool, a cemetery of rats, the haunt of cockroaches bent on destruction. That Dixon, in his frenzied search through the vessel, did not come across him is not to be wondered at. The average mate never learns that there are such things as tunnel wells unless the time comes when an unfortunate manner drives the engineers to desperate measures, and they drown him in one.

Mr. Bidgood, lying almost unconscious under the plank with the water dripping around him, heard noises above and thought it was the rain beating on the roof. It was an awful storm, but at the same time no public-house, even in those unprosperous days for the liquor trade, would have the right to put him in a leaky attic. He would see

proprietor about it in the morning, and if the barmaid did not like it—well—she could do the other thing. A lot he cared ! A bed like this—hadn't been made for weeks ! Damp sheets ! They thought anything was good enough for him. Why, the whole place was wet. This was a rum state of affairs. It wanted a bit of thinking over. Should he get up now, or wait until daylight ? Returning understanding ordered now. He put out a hand to obey, and became conscious of the fact that his mattress felt very cold and very slimy. In a moment he was wide awake ; in a minute he was crawling cautiously along the tunnel ; a minute later he had arrived at the engine-room.

In the darkness that reigned there, and amid the multitude of pipes and pumps and oddments of machinery which sprouted from the floor and arched above like pergolas, an ordinary man would still have been at a loss, but Mr. Bidgood knew to an inch the position of all these obstacles, and, dodging them neatly, reached the platform in a few seconds.

Here he lit a lamp and closely examined himself. It was as he had feared. That cold and draughty feeling about his legs had proved too true an indication of calamity.

The colonel's blue trousers, made, doubtless, by a tailor who never suspected that they would have to suffer an attack in the rear, had fought their last fight and were now in a hopeless condition. He put a hand behind him and could feel nothing but red singlet.

"Drat it !" said Mr. Bidgood. "They must have been rotten !"

For a modest man like him the predicament was an unfortunate one. He wanted light, heat, meat, drink, and the companionship of his fellow men. He wanted to go on deck and find someone to share his troubles.

But how could he with those two women on board ? For all he knew to the contrary they might be hanging

about the engine-room door at that very moment. likely they were; such was the annoying nature of the

The steam gauge shewed ten pounds. "I'll await the stokehold and warm myself," muttered Mr. Bidgood.

There were no fires to speak of left in the furnace, merely a few white embers at the back of the grates, embers that looked as if their glow had gone for ever. But Bidgood was a specialist. Had the ghost of Nero—always supposing that gentleman to be still interested in fire—happened to look into the stokehold during the next day or so, envy would have seized him. Never was there a masterly exhibition of the way to handle shovel, damper, pricker and slice, and never before had Mr. Bidgood met with such success. The fires glowed, they flickered, they leapt and roared, and he, at first a tender nurse, increased their increasing energy with a greater one. He tickled them, he goaded them, and cursed them, forgetting the outside world as a child with a spade on the sands forgets the tide. Beginning with an idea of warming himself, he ended in a fury of sweat, and sat down on an upturned bucket under the ventilator to cool down. The blue tunic, laid off in the midst of labour an hour ago, lay beside him among the dust and cinders. He picked up the garb—never again, alas, to strike terror into the enemy—wiped himself.

He was now quite dry and even smarting with the cold. His face and singlet glowed, rivalling the ruddy glow of the flames. Playful flames cast their flickering light into the farthest and grimiest corners of the stokehold. He looked like a powerful wizard in the midst of business. He felt as comfortable as if sitting at a fireside before the gas was turned off. But this sensation did not last very long. The steam from the boilers, aroused, began to buzz; and at the sound he jumped up with a start and strode off to the engine-room to examine the gauge glasses.

Follow him round as he lights the lamps, pausing a moment before each as if to bask in the glow of it. Bend beside him as he looks into the bilges, and as he stoops to start the pump. He will not see you, he will not hear you. For a great idea has come to him, an idea transcending every other that he has captured and used until now.

What were they, these captains and mates, owners and passengers, who sat on the decks of steamers and had rides like little boys on roundabouts? Did they recognise the tremendous forces at work beneath them? Did they know that yonder quiet man, grey-haired and underpaid, and long since, alas, outgrown the manhole of a boiler, could at a twitch of the forefinger make a mock of safety and turn their joy to tears? If they did, they shewed it not. Theirs was a heedless life, flitting about in the sunshine, gay in gold lace, in silk, white duck, and swallow-tails. A lesson now and then to such was not amiss. A demonstration of their exact worth by one who was skilled at the business had its uses.

Do not follow him now as he flies round the engines intent and eager. He might run into you, and what he would say if he did, goodness, thank Heaven, does not know. You may see him ascend a ladder and open check valves. You may see him, lamp in hand and legs enveloped in the steam from the drain cocks, start the boiler-pump. He disappears into the stokehold, and there sounds the clink of a shovel at work. Then back again, busy with oil cans, with swabbing brushes, spanners, handles, levers, cocks, valves, until the steam begins to hiss, the drains begin to rattle, and the very air of the engine-room vibrates as if alive. Above, the tops of the engines shew dark and still, but about the space lit by the lamps every tiny piece of polished work gleams like a jewel, and shadows driven into corners stand there as though for ever.

He is back on the platform now, tapping at the dials of

the gauges. Were they barometers one could swear his face that the weather is likely to be fine. His singlet hangs about him like a flag. A pool of sweat on the chequered plates already marks the place he occupies. And the pointer of the steam dial nearest him leaps and up, and up.

He opens a valve, and the quick thud of the reversing gear echoes through the engine-room. He pulls a lever, he turns a wheel. The steam roars; the rods shudder, they twitch. And, with a howl and a whistle, the engines move slowly round, and then faster, faster.

"Bidgood!" howled the mate from above, in a piercing voice.

"Hallo there!" shouted Mr. Bidgood jauntily, shutting off the steam. The engines slackened to a loose canter and a moment later stopped. "That'll give 'em a start," muttered Mr. Bidgood, referring to the people on deck. He took a spanner from the rack and went to tighten the leaking gland.

The mate continued howling somewhere up above, but what he said was unintelligible, and besides, no mate has any right to stand and howl at an engineer. It shows a lack of respect.

"If he's got anything to say he can just come down and say it in a proper manner," said Mr. Bidgood to himself with dignity.

He finished his job and descended to the platform, where he walked up and down in great content.

"Mr. Bidgood!" Somebody else hailed him. It seemed like the owner's voice.

"Sir," he answered, trying to make a roar sound respectful.

"Are you there?" Thomas Todd asked.

"Yes, sir." Now what did they suppose? Hadn't they heard the engines?

"It must be him," cried Thomas Todd.

"He's saved," shrieked a voice, which even at that distance he recognised as Mary's.

He heard the gratings clatter, he heard the ladders rattle, and catching a glimpse of a white skirt above, with something like a hot blush he bolted into the store-room, and stood behind the door.

"Dear me! This is most extraordinary!" exclaimed Thomas Todd. The noise they made as they arrived on the platform told Mr. Bidgood distinctly that there must be four or five of them.

"He's not here," observed the mate in a quavering voice. "Perhaps he's round at the back."

"We'll go and see. We must really!" said Thomas Todd boldly.

Somebody struck a match, obviously in order to light a lamp. Mr. Bidgood heard the party shuffle along the platform. The sound of their footsteps died away.

"I'll slip away on deck and get changed," muttered Mr. Bidgood, greatly flustered. Very quietly, and with a trembling hand, he opened the shutter an inch, and peeped through; and then rendered bold by the fact that nobody was visible, opened it wider, and, poking his head outside, found himself face to face with Mary.

"Mr. Bidgood!" she shrieked. He would have given a good deal for the courage to cut her dead, but—

"Good-evening, miss," he found himself saying.

"You're not a ghost! I knew you weren't a ghost," she cried, and like a flash she sprang and clasped him round the neck. "Oh, darling Mr. Bidgood! I am so awfully glad!"

Helen, who, attracted by the noise they made, was the first to return, declared afterwards that she distinctly saw

Mary kissing Mr. Bidgood ; but they both denied this truth to tell nobody cared much whether she had whether she had not.

All of them felt that nothing was good enough for that evening.

"Come up and we'll open a bottle of champagne there's one left," urged Thomas Todd.

"Not just now, sir," said Mr. Bidgood, shaking head.

"Well, beer then ? "

"No, sir," said Mr. Bidgood firmly, and then perceiving a shadow flit across the owner's face he added, "To the truth, I'm not fit to be seen."

"Oh, never mind your clothes," chorused the ladies. They pressed him hard, saying that he must come look at his handiwork, the ship afloat, that he must not come ; but gently, and with a look on his face that grew more uneasy as their urgency increased, he repulsed them, and so at last they turned and, disappointed, ascended the ladder.

"Dixon ! " called out Mr. Bidgood after them. The mate hurried back.

"I suppose they have some more work to do," remarked Mary. "Men are hateful when there's anything to be done. They forget all about us."

Whatever this business was it did not take long. Some fifteen minutes later a feast had begun in the saloon, the guest of the evening being Mr. Bidgood. They crammed him with dainties, and pressed him with questions. He must have told his tale a dozen times, and each time they found in it new beauties to be wondered at.

"And you knew all the while that you could get the ship afloat ? " asked Mary, popping a pickled onion into her mouth. "Isn't it extraordinary, Mr. Todd ? "

"Most extraordinary!" agreed the owner emphatically. "That business of the tank is most puzzling. I can't make out why the mutineers never thought of running the water into it and canting the ship."

Mr. Bidgood's jaws worked violently for a few moments.

"The valve had jammed somewhere," he explained at last. "Evans thought it was open, but it wasn't. Of course I saw what was wrong in a jiffy. I——"

"You're a darling!" said Mary, popping in another pickled onion.

Once, in a gallery, he had seen a picture of a stout, jolly gentleman who evidently lived in a hot country, and whom lovely ladies were garlanding with roses.

"Oh, I'm all right," he told her, beaming.

But his crown was yet to come. Captain Porter suddenly stopped snoring and sat up.

"I was afraid we would wake him," said Helen soberly. "We ought not to have made so much noise. It was my fault for not having warned you."

"Not at all," Thomas Todd told her.

They tried to make the captain lie down again, but he refused. He said he wanted to talk to Bidgood.

"Here he is, then," said the mate.

"You're a brick, Bidgood," jerked out Captain Porter, blinking. He gazed round the saloon, noticed his tin box lying beside him, and spread his hand upon it. "I thought you were a worm!" he went on. "Dozens and dozens of times I thought you were a worm! I tried to prove it to myself after the colonel handed over his passage money. Bidgood, what's the use of arguing? It was up to me to have divided out that passage money!"

"Say no more about it," urged Mr. Bidgood, greatly affected.

"I shall say what I like," returned the captain fiercely.

" And I'll say it again. You ought to have had your share of that passage money. Now don't deny it."

Mr. Bidgood shewed no signs of doing so.

" I might have given it to you, but I thought you were trying to worm and wheedle," continued the captain violently. " I thought you were sucking up to the owner. And I said to myself when I saw you, ' He shan't have it. When I was caught and shut up in the cabin, do you know what kept me awake at night and put me off my grub? Do you know? "

" Quite so," said Mr. Bidgood, looking a shade bewildered.

" Do you know? " demanded the captain, half rising in his excitement.

" I don't," confessed Mr. Bidgood.

" I said to myself: ' Now I'm put away, Bidgood with the pinch that passage money.' That was what kept running through my brain, day and night, night and day."

" I never thought of it," gasped Mr. Bidgood truthfully.

" But you didn't," went on Captain Porter. " You are a brick! A true blue! That's what you are, a true blue I've never met one before. I didn't know such a thing existed. . . . When they doped me," he continued, " and put me on the settee, and this tin box rolled out . . . then it all came on me like a flash. What you in your modesty have been trying to hide from me for years ' Why, he's an honest man,' I said to myself."

" I never tried to hide it," protested Mr. Bidgood.

" You did, Bidgood," asseverated the captain earnestly. " You know you did."

" It doesn't matter," the owner broke in. " You're my friends now and we are all of us extremely glad to see it."

No sleep for those on board the *Susan Dale* that night! Only love and laughter, wine (and beer) and song.

" Are these white persons gone mad? " enquired the old Malay testily in the cabin.

"Not mad," answered Suliemina, peeping through a crack. "But very playful. To-night must be the occasion of a festival. The younger mem is now making a chant; she sits on the table and, while she sings, flicks at the Tuan engineer with her handkerchief, to his great content. Truly these white women have no shame!"

"Perhaps a wedding has been arranged for her," observed the old man acutely.

"It is high time one was," said Suliemina in contemptuous tones. She squatted in the corner beside her husband.

CHAPTER XXVII

IT was rather an extraordinary thing—well, perhaps not so very extraordinary after all—that a thought similar to that expressed by Suliemina should have occurred to Mr. Bidgood.

He saw all these young creatures about him—young, fresh, full of life—is not love an infant? He observed them closely. He knew exactly how they felt. That anxious look, peeping out through the barrier of smiles which the owner's face was protected with—had he not worn a similar look himself when the housemaid toyed with him at Brighton?

Sometimes in those days he had not known exactly where he was. If only he could have removed the girl from Brighton—Brighton with its milkmen, butchers, and grocers, its back doors, its atmosphere of intrigue—if he could have removed her to a desert island, say, where she would have been subject to no outside interference whatever, he might eventually have made her Mrs. Bidgood. But that was not to be; and nowadays, when his memory strayed back, and he thought of her, and of the number of people who might by this time have been calling him father, he always ended up by sighing contentedly, if a little sentimentally, and admitting that, in his case at any rate, things had been ordered for the best.

True, there still remained a regret, once poignant, now grown shadowy indeed, that he had not blacked the grocer's other eye; but for his early love he had no other feeling

than gratitude for favours never to be forgotten. He wished her well, she of the bold black eyes, the trim cap and apron, the clever tongue, the slender, yielding waist, which he, the daring Mr. Bidgood——

To cut matters short, he, Mr. Bidgood, understood exactly how the owner felt and, for the matter of that, how the rest of them felt. And as, naturally, they were all too modest publicly to make known their wishes, and as, moreover, Captain Porter, though a smart man as regards money matters, was an absolute chucklehead when it came to delicate questions involving the adjustment of relations between the sexes, it clearly was his—Mr. Bidgood's—duty, as it also was his pleasure, to straighten things up generally for everybody.

Of course in one way or another he had been doing this all the voyage. But this fact did not weigh with him for an instant. After all, what would his assistance amount to? A little kindness from the immense stock at his disposal, a little advice from his experience, a little guidance, that was all.

Perhaps they would never know he had done it! No, that would not do either! He would lead up to the matter tactfully, yet openly, and give his owner an exhibition of the skill with which a mind exercised on engines could handle other matters when required.

They were talking about nuts when he arrived at his decision. Mary had asked what a pea-nut was, and Mr. Bidgood, sitting tight in his chair, waited warily for the answer.

"They grow in the ground," Captain Porter told her.

"Really?" said Thomas Todd. "Are you sure? I always thought that it was ground nuts that grew in the ground."

"It's the same thing, sir," the captain assured him.

"Is that so?" exclaimed Thomas Todd. "Oh, I do

wish I'd brought my encyclopædia. I suppose when is roughing it one must expect to be deprived of comforts. But really, I miss it. . . . Ground nut—h—and probably by the same process of reasoning we assume that Philippine nuts grow in the Philippine Islands?"

"It's onalegous," conceded Captain Porter, "but not on all fours."

"What are Philippine nuts?" asked the mate. Bidgood leant back despairingly. Were they never going to talk of anything else?

"Oh, you big stupid!" said Mary. "Don't you know? You crack them and you find two inside and then you wish."

"Not at once," pointed out Helen, correcting her.

"I know what you would wish, miss, if you had one cut in Mr. Bidgood, leaning forward and addressing her pointedly. The time had come.

"But you don't wish," said Helen, smiling at the owner. "You——"

Mr. Bidgood brushed the objection aside. "No matter about that," he insisted. "Suppose now you had a nut and you could wish and you did wish, I know what you would wish."

"Then really, Mr. Bidgood, you know more than I do," returned Helen, smiling.

"I know," declared Mr. Bidgood, and, afraid she would try and change the subject, he added rapidly, "And I'll tell you if you like!"

"Well?" said Helen, still smiling.

"You would wish," stated Mr. Bidgood impressively "that you could marry Mr. Todd this very evening, and no more shillyshallying."

He leant back in his chair and surveyed the company calmly. These things were so simple when you knew how to do them.

" Oh, Mr. Bidgood ! " exclaimed Helen, flushing scarlet.
" E-yo ! " shrieked Mary. " Oh, and I'd be bridesmaid, and you'd be best man——" patting him rapidly on the arm. She seemed to have no respect for a hero or age either ! This must be stopped at once.

" But what about you and the mate ? " enquired Mr. Bidgood severely. " You're worse than they are."

The pats ceased. If Helen's face was scarlet what was hers ? She asked the mate afterwards. He replied that he liked the colour.

Mr. Bidgood noticed that even in their excitement neither of the ladies said " No." They merely said " O," which was shorter and more encouraging.

" We've a long voyage before us," he went on ; " maybe six weeks, maybe six months. And me and Captain Porter here——"

" What ! " exclaimed the captain.

" Me and Captain Porter here," insisted Mr. Bidgood, winking furiously at his superior.

" I never——" began the captain.

" ——and Captain Porter 'ere, who is grateful to me for saving the ship and not pinching his money," insisted Mr. Bidgood—fancy him calmly doing such a thing, even the day before !—" with all due and lawful respect to Mr. Todd, don't like couples canoodling about the decks and getting in the way of the sailors."

" I do not," agreed Captain Porter, eyeing the mate sternly.

" Therefore," concluded Mr. Bidgood with inspired cunning, " being outside of the four-mile limit, Captain Porter thinks that the best thing he can do, to do away with the nuisance, is to get his books and splice you all up now, according to the regulations of the Board of Trade."

" I never said so——" began the captain again.

" For which he always charges a fee," remarked Mr. Bidgood, mightily calm.

"Yes, I always charge a fee," corroborated Captain Porter in a milder voice.

"He makes it more after midnight," went on Mr. Bidgood, with a propitiating wink at his superior.

"I do not mind the fee," said Thomas Todd. "But dear me, this is so sudden! It hardly gives one time to consider." He looked at Helen hesitatingly.

"I don't know what to say," said she, glancing sideways at him. It was plain, to Mr. Bidgood at any rate, that she had a remarkably good idea.

"Of course—I must point out—er—it's only fair," observed Thomas Todd, fidgeting nervously with his glasses—"there's the legality of the matter to consider."

"It's not that I fear," returned Helen with a shy glance.

"It mayn't be a good marriage, you know," he went on hurriedly. "Captain Porter may not have the exact power—er—to marry us."

"Power to marry you!" said the captain, looking slightly. "Why, do you know, sir, outside the four-mile limit I can hang you if I want to!"

"No, no; surely not!" exclaimed Thomas Todd. "I am certain, quite certain you are mistaken. I could prove it to you, if I had my encyclopædia——"

"Damn your encyclopædia," roared the captain, getting up. "I'll shew you the Board of Trade regulations." He walked out of the saloon, and they all sat staring at each other.

Thomas Todd was the first to break the silence. "This is most awful, most inconvenient—for you, that is," he remarked in a perturbed way. "He doesn't seem to be quite right yet. How touchy he was! Almost like a lunatic."

"We must try and humour him," suggested Helen gently. "Poor fellow!"

"Yes, yes, I know. I quite agree. But do you think,

now, that a marriage made in order to humour a lunatic would hold good in the courts ? That strikes me as a point which needs consideration."

They sat surveying each other, he anxiously, she calmly, and from that silent exchange of glances Helen was not the first to retire.

"I can trust you, Thomas," she said at last in a meek voice.

He cleared his throat nervously.

"Oh, isn't it an awful lark," cried Mary with a laugh that had just a touch of hysteria in it.

"It's a very solemn occasion," Helen told her reprov-
ingly.

"So it is," said Mary in a voice grown suddenly scared. She began to look at the mate, and Mr. Bidgood made haste to turn up the lamp so that she might see clearly the sort of man she was in for.

What part he was to take in the coming ceremony he was not exactly sure. He would have to act as a kind of verger, probably, a man to see that everything was done fair, square, and above board, to sign his name when and where required, and to swear if necessary, to act as best man to both parties, and to give the brides away. In fact, as usual, all the dirty work was left to him. What use to repine ? He was in for it ; he would have to make the best of it.

Putting on his most cheerful expression, as if to drive away the gloom that seemed to have settled on the little group around him, he began to tidy up the saloon, hiding unseemly beer bottles (empty ones), straightening the little table-cloth, and again turning up the lamp, the oil in the container of which was beginning to run low.

"It will soon be over," he remarked, sitting down again at the end of the table. Helen and the owner sat on his right apart. The couple on his left were close together, and

it seemed to him as though underneath the table the mate was holding Mary's hand. But why wouldn't they talk? They were only making him nervous, and how was he to get through it if he was nervous?

"A lot of wind about this morning," he observed.

"Yes," said Helen in a hushed voice.

They sat still and solemn-faced as though in church.

And presently he too began to experience a feeling akin to reverence. This was after Captain Porter had come back again, after Captain Porter had taken a seat at the other end of the table, after Captain Porter, with his face the colour of a lobster, and at imminent risk of bursting, had sailed through the somewhat stormy opening of the marriage service to the calmer waters beyond.

"Wilt thou have this woman—you, Mr. Todd, and you, Dixon—to be thy wedded wife?" asked the captain, and Mr. Bidgood waited for the answer, knowing quite well what it would be, but still very interested. There they were, these friends of his, friends of a week or so, that would perhaps be his friends for ever. There they stood, hand in hand, taking no notice of him at the moment, but conscious, doubtless, all the time of what they had to thank him for.

The dying lamp smoked and flickered. Do what he would its light grew ever dimmer. Shadows invaded the saloon, shadows grave and softening as those at evensong. They were to travel together two and two, these friends of his, while he would wander on, grey-haired and alone. Would they always be his friends? Would they remember him in their happiness?

"I will," said Helen.

"I will," said Mary.

"Amen," said Mr. Bidgood absentmindedly.

"Bidgood," barked Captain Porter, discarding instantly his ecclesiastical voice.

" Sir ? "

" Is it you that's being spliced ? "

Mr. Bidgood hastened to reply in the negative.

" Anyone would think it was, by the way you're going on," said the captain.

That was just like Porter. As jealous as ever.

They must have sat on for nearly half an hour after the ceremony was ended. Captain Porter finally disposed of all doubts as to whether the marriages were legal or not, by requesting that any person who should have a word to say about the matter might be brought before him, when he would at once dump him overboard.

He also told them a little about his captivity. He was well treated, it appeared, and Tingle on one or two occasions came and sat for the best part of an hour with him, trying to cheer him up.

" Not such a bad soul," Captain Porter told them. " He has been in this revolution business for years, and is getting about fed up with it, so he says. It was Canaba and the Spaniards that were making all the trouble on board, and from what I could make out the whole business is a try on. Tingle's got a lump sum to come out and start a disturbance in the Philippines, to try and get some big pot at home into a row, and he's sorry now he came. He wouldn't have hurt a hair of your heads if you'd have given him his picture. He couldn't do without it. The whole revolution depended on it. What do you think of that, sir ? " he asked Thomas Todd at the end of the tale.

At length a faint daylight entered the saloon, and the lamp, as though relieved of guard, gave a flicker and expired. They awoke to the fact that morning had come, and went on deck. Already the edges of the ragged hills were glowing, already the clear sky blushed. But as the brides and their grooms advanced to the rail the scarlet melted to orange ; and backed by that colour, reminiscent

of weddings, the sun shewed his bald head over the edge of the hills, and winked.

"We must see about getting the anchor up," said the captain. "You'd better go below, Bidgood. How soon can you be ready with the engines?"

"Very good," said Mr. Bidgood. "I shall be ready in twenty minutes." He left at once.

"You get about your duties too, Dixon," ordered the captain, who seemed to have come on deck with a perfect passion for work.

In a moment there were only three left to watch the sunrise. It became plain, when the mists rolled away, that the ship, in spite of her anchor, had drifted outwards during the night. The clump of cocoanut palms, easily distinguishable the day before, was now merged into its general background. The white beach had disappeared, perhaps covered by the tide.

"I can't see any of those villains," said Thomas Todd, looking hard. Neither could the others, but the land was in shadow and the sunlight dancing on the water filled their eyes.

"Perhaps they never reached the shore," suggested Helen.

"They must have done," said Mary. "Of course." She glanced along the ship to the bridge, where the captain was already standing, armed with a telescope. "I'll see what Captain Porter says," she ended, and, leaving them, she tripped along the deck with the air of a butterfly on business bent.

Signs were not wanting to remind her of the past danger. There was an unusual litter of orange and banana skins about; broken bottles lay in corners where the waves had swept them, and the davits swung outwards empty and forlorn.

"The dirty condition of the bridge," so she told Captain

Porter, "well, dear me, really it's most extraordinary! Shall I tidy up that piece of string and put it in your string bag?" she asked.

"It's not a piece of string," said Captain Porter. "That's the lead line." He looked at her out of his little china eyes. "Passengers are not allowed up on the bridge," he continued.

"Quite right! Very right!" Mary agreed emphatically. "We must keep out the crowd. . . . I'm the chief officer's wife now," she added.

"Um," said Captain Porter.

"Mrs. Dixon, Junior," said Mary, smiling bewitchingly. "That makes a difference, doesn't it, captain?"

"Yes, maybe it does, maybe it does," acknowledged Captain Porter, in a mild sort of way. He walked to the rail, and began to study the shore through his telescope. Mary, with ostentation, stooped, picked up a small piece of fluff, and threw it over the side.

"I do detest untidiness," she said, edging up to the captain. "Can you see anything?"

"They are launching their boats," said the captain. "We shall have to get a move on." He walked to the forward rail. "Dixon," he shouted to the mate on the forecastle head. "Slip that anchor altogether. We can't stop to heave it up."

"You're not going to throw it away?" asked Mary.

"I am," said the captain.

"But it will be a long time before they can row out here."

"We want to get away before then," the captain explained shortly.

"Then what's to become of them?" asked Mary, grown serious all on a sudden. "You're never going to leave them behind? Why, Colonel Tingle would be awfully ill. He's not a bit used to it."

"They'll be all right," said the captain. "I know the

coast, and since the Rajah's had it, why, miss—Mr. Dixon—you're safer there than you would be in the Commercial Road."

He reached over and rang the telegraph. A minute later the ship was forging ahead.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ABOUT two o'clock that afternoon the bearded captain of a bristling cruiser which was hovering off the Borneo coast, an eagle in wait for the rising sun, left the luncheon table, and came on deck, followed by his officers. The sky seemed brighter than when last he had seen it, an hour or so before, the colour of the sea a more cheerful blue than ever, the very clouds arranged just as he would have arranged them himself.

He looked around his vessel. All was well. Masts, funnels, and ventilators still stood in their allotted places. So far, so good.

At a dignified pace—he was a portly man—and with many a salute, he passed along the spotless deck, patting now and then with a white-gloved hand a trusty gun, and at length, still followed by his officers, he ascended to the bridge.

Once safely there, he drew a deep breath and looked about him. The day was a lovely one, a restful one. Fish slept on the surface of the oily sea; lilies might have grown there. There one could see the inverted image of the heavens. On the horizon tiny islands floated. The scene breathed peace. And the captain, although by nature warlike, felt at the moment peaceful also. He lit another cigarette, and turning, walked slowly across the bridge to survey the ocean on the other side of his vessel. The glittering group of officers followed. As they approached the rail one might have observed a momentary shadow

of surprise flit across their faces, succeeded immediately with a look of unconcern. They stood aside and waited for the result of their captain's investigation.

"A small steamer," he told them. "They are coming." He drew another deep breath and made to descend the ladder, pausing with his hand on the rail for another moment. The funnel of the small vessel now emitted a faint steam. A moment later the sound of her horn smote their ears.

"They are in distress, I think," he said. "Get the boats and give me a telescope."

When they handed him one he looked again. He saw the Union Jack flying upside down, and a man at the foremast waving desperately. He saw the barrels on the hatch, the house flag at the peak, the single figure on the bridge, two women by the stern, and marvelled that a ship so sparsely manned should move along as fast as one did.

But then he did not see, and he did not know of, a small and rather grimy gentleman in a red singlet, who, swaying and profusely sweating, was pacing the engine-room platform in front of her.

THE END

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